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THE DYNASTS
AND THE POST-WAR AGE
IN POETRY

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THE DYNASTS
AND THE POST-WAR AGE
IN POETRY

A STUDY IN MODERN IDEAS

BY

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IN MEMORY OF
MY SISTER
AMALA

PREFACE

MODERN poetry is charged with problems of belief, conflicts of consciousness, and with the attempt to shape, in art, a way of mind which will indicate life's saner amplitudes. These pages are offered, with a sense of inadequacy, towards the elucidation of post-War effort and belief.

Hardy's *The Dynasts* was chosen as a promontory from whence to view the turbulent stretches of modern verse. The peculiar complex of contemporary mind can be traced to Hardy's own poetry and prose, especially to his great epic: he seems already to have been aware of the implications, in a modern sense, of war, of dictatorship, of elemental psychological storms, and to have probed into the mysteries of Nature and man's evolving Will. Modern verse has carried the *application* of ideas many steps forward—we are passing through a phase of experimentation—and poets to-day talk of planning, panaceas, psychological and philosophical cures. Behind much provisional thinking, however, can be discerned the pattern of mental stresses linking up Hardy with the moderns.

This book forms part of a work which includes a detailed analysis of contemporary poets, but these pages contain, it is believed, a completeness restricted to the basic problems posed for us by Hardy's poetry.

I owe more than I can possibly express to Balliol College, where I studied, and to the generous atmosphere of Oxford. Without the encouragement of Professor D. Nichol Smith this book would never have been written, and I wish to be allowed to express my profound thankfulness to Dr. and Mrs. A. D. Lindsay, whose inspiration has been valuable for me. To Mr. and Mrs. H. N. Spalding, and to Professor Lascelles Abercrombie I am indebted for their unfailing goodness to me, and for much helpful criticism. Professor Abercrombie's work on Hardy has been frequently referred to in these pages.

PREFACE

To Winifred Holtby, whose untimely death has removed a writer of unique imaginative power from literature, I am indebted for some understanding of the deeper constructive forces of modern Europe: even with the eager sympathy of one geographically belonging to alien shores, I might have missed the significance of the contemporary phase of the English mind in the welter of doctrinaire verse.

Mr. N. Coghill and Mr. C. S. Lewis have both given me constructive suggestions, and while in no way imparting responsibility for any of my opinions to them, or to others who have given me the best of Oxford traditions—and here I would include the names of Mr. M. R. Ridley and Mr. Edmund Blunden—I offer to them my sincere expressions of gratitude. Mr. Blunden's poems—particularly those written during the War-years—come in for detailed analysis in Appendix II.

I cannot conclude this lengthy but still incomplete acknowledgement without mentioning the name of C. F. Andrews, whose guidance has been of enduring help to me.

AMIYA CHAKRAVARTY.

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
-------------------	-----

BOOK I

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

I. Hardy's <i>The Dynasts</i>	
A. Statement of the Problem	3
✓B. <i>The Dynasts</i> as a Modern Mythology	8
C. <i>The Dynasts</i> and the Evolution of the Will	21
D. Fore-Scene	27
II. <i>The Dynasts</i> (cont.)	34
III. <i>The Dynasts</i> (cont.)	47
IV. <i>The Dynasts</i> (cont.)	55
V. <i>The Dynasts</i> (The After-Scene)	66
VI. <i>The Dynasts</i> —Its Significance for our Times	77

BOOK II

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

I. The Nature of Analytical Poetry	85
II. Hardy and the Modern Poetic Drama	92

APPENDICES

I. The Nineties—Some Opinions	129
II. Hardy and 'War-Poetry'	136

BOOK I

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

CHAPTER I

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

§ A. *Statement of the Problem*

... if the Essence
and characteristic faculty of humanity
is our conscient Reason ...

The Testament of Beauty.

THE dominant problem in modern poetry, both as a subjective concern and as revealed in its manner of expression, is the problem of self-consciousness. In Hardy's poems, particularly in *The Dynasts*, we find it shown in relationship with cosmic nature. A period of nineteenth-century history is used to depict the forces of nature and of consciousness as involved in the integral process of creation.

Already before Darwin's and Huxley's scientific theory had been evolved, a new attempt had appeared in poetry¹ to interpret existence as a continuity, as an interlinked development. The apparent breaks in the link were not ignored, but analysed with an increasing urge for co-ordination. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* marks a stage beyond that of Wordsworth's communion with Nature and Man, in that such a communion was sought not only in rare moments of exaltation, but in all levels of intellectual cognition. Not that Wordsworth, as has been contended, was unaware of Nature's disruptive forces, but for him the realization of 'something far more deeply interfused' in Nature than reason could approach, and which corresponded

¹ Bradley writes, 'though he [Tennyson] wrote *In Memoriam* before the days of Darwin, [he] had fully realized and keenly felt the conflict, pain, and waste in Nature; so that it presented to him not a solution, but the same problem as man's life, and required the same further guarantee' (*A Miscellany*, by A. C. Bradley, Oxford, 1929, pp. 10, 11).

T. S. Eliot, writing in 1936, mentions the same fact: 'Much has been said of Tennyson's interest in contemporary science, and of the impression of Darwin. *In Memoriam*, in any case, antedates *The Origin of Species* by several years . . .' (*Essays Ancient and Modern*, by T. S. Eliot, London, 1936, p. 186).

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

with 'the still sad music of humanity' and its joyous moods, was an end in itself. To question the validity of his experience is irrelevant,¹ the point is that the modern age is seeking a fuller application of our knowledge of unity; literature for it must be an orchestration of manifold aspects of experience.² Poetry of passionate apprehension of one or the other aspect of reality will always survive; but the poetry of comprehensive consciousness has also been growing. How the two kinds of artistic expression which are correlated to human experience as we know it to-day will affect each other as time passes, it is impossible to prophesy. It can be confidently hoped, however, that fresh lyrics newly sprung in June will never fade while the human heart is alive, that the poetry of purely personal emotion and spontaneous reaction to life will always maintain its power. English poetry in all ages, including the present one, proves this to be true.³ Wordsworth himself carried the syn-

¹ When Mr. Aldous Huxley recommends Wordsworth to take a voyage out to the tropics to change his views on Nature, he apparently imagines that wild flora and fauna would shatter the poet's profound realizations; as if any catalogue of discords could disprove a melody.

² In the same book (*Do What You Will*, Chatto & Windus, p. 117) Mr. Huxley says: 'He [Wordsworth] will not admit that a yellow primrose is simply a yellow primrose—beautiful, but essentially strange, having its own alien life apart.'

By the use of the word 'beautiful' Mr. Huxley himself shows that the primrose is *not* alienated from our life. Wordsworth made us aware of this more than any other poet had done before him. To-day we often complain that he does not go far enough, for the revelations of applied thought have made some of the workings of aesthetic and natural laws clearer to us; indeed, Mr. Huxley's article really asks for a widening of 'awareness'. The real problem behind this is indicated by the deepest currents of modern poetry since Hardy, in which attempt is being made to maintain the sense of unity by apprehension of further correlations in existence. Vague pantheism is as foreign to it as categorically labelled rigidities of thought.

³ In *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (Cambridge, 1933) Mr. A. E. Housman establishes with the utmost lucidity and charm the claims of pure lyrical poetry; poetry, which is 'adulterated with so little meaning' (p. 41), moving us by 'the strong tremor of unreasonable excitement which . . . words set up in some region deeper than the mind' (p. 44). Poetry, as he says, must be free from 'the centralized tyranny of the intellect' (p. 40); it is 'indeed . . . more physical than intellectual' (p. 46); it is 'not the thing said but a way of saying it' (p. 37). With the subtle, incantational, suggestive, rhythmical, verbal qualities which must go with poetic expression Mr. Housman mainly identifies Poetry itself. In abjuring the deliberate poetry of Wit, of the Johnsonian tradition, he shows us that in the eighteenth century 'Man had ceased to live from the depths of his nature; he occupied himself for choice with thoughts

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

thesis of the two kinds of poetry—if such an expression can be used—farther and more self-consciously, yet with profound imaginative power, than ever before. Blake's world is charged with new interrelations, and he covers them with the magic of imperishable poetry. But he had a mystic's disdain for intellectual logic, an apathy for the 'vegetable universe', for the operations of law in the human field or in the Newtonian realm, which Wordsworth transcended. And yet Blake's poetry helped the Romantic Revival, on which the later nineteenth century was to build its poetry of analytical consciousness. The Victorian Age carried on farther the process of blending mystical intuitions with the rational beauty of thought; the demands of the realistic world had then become too insistent for the poet to drive them out from his art. This process of sifting experience in hours

Touched with a certain silver light
In each man's retrospection,¹

or introspection, and of presenting 'thoughts long knitted into a single thought'² in poetry which may move us 'by the intellectual sweetness of [its] lines'³ has gone on rapidly in modernist poetry. Whether it will result again in great poetry has yet to be seen.

It is with the poetry of the 'new consciousness' and the fundamental struggle of its belief that we are here concerned. The nature of this modern effort to re-interpret the universe of its imaginative understanding has to be traced from the time of

that do not range beyond the sphere of the understanding; he lighted the candles and drew down the blind to shut out that patroness of poets, the moon' (p. 19).

The important point that emerges, in connexion with the nature of modern poetry being studied here, is that even when poetry is not purely lyrical it must be organized not by the intellect alone but by the fundamental activity of the imagination, and, of course, the other elements of poetic composition must come in. In other words, passionate realization of new relations in life and thought, intimations of new values, must 'receive from poetry an enhancement which glorifies and almost transfigures them, and which is not perceived to be a separate thing except by analysis' (p. 36).

¹ *In My Time*, by Edmund Blunden, *London Mercury*, Jan. 1936.

² *Coole Park*, p. 274, *Collected Poems*, by W. B. Yeats (Macmillan, 1933).

³ *Ibid.*

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

the great Victorian poets. If Tennyson, uncomfortably aware of 'Nature, red in tooth and claw', stressed his knowledge of facts, his poetry faced their challenge, even though it had to fall back upon the faith of honest doubt, as we have to, when incompatibilities and frustrations baffle our understanding. He made poetry out of a new pain which invested the knowledge of extended unities with special significance and was therefore all the more sensitive to thwarting evil; but his attitude is fundamentally that of acceptance.¹ Wrongs and imperfections, to him, are *conditional* to existence, so are the inequalities and distresses of human society. In the light of spiritual awakening these difficulties will find their justification in our mind; death will bring to us the supreme affirmation. The problem of will and consciousness, and its relation to the constant growth in man's humanity and his consequent power of *reconditioning* existence, are not clearly envisaged; but Tennyson's poetry shines with a serene conviction of the divine purpose behind all phenomena, of the immortality of the human soul; his mind crosses the bar of apparent reality to the eternal presence of Truth. Browning entered life's fray as a fighter; with a realist's courage he welcomed each rebuff, believing that the sufferings of a contrary world were necessary to draw out the best in man; life was to him a 'probation',² machinery meant to shape the soul. When faced with broken arcs he saw the perfect round in a certitude of faith—'we musicians know'. Browning's poetry is alternately illuminated by the sheer exultation of existence, and the courage of endurance. But though he

¹ Mr. T. S. Eliot in 're-establishing' Tennyson cannot resist extreme statements: 'I should reproach Tennyson not for mildness, or tepidity, but rather for lack of serenity' (*Essays Ancient and Modern*, p. 181).

The other points raised by Mr. Eliot in the same book with regard to the difference 'between the religious attitude and what is quite a different thing, the belief in human perfectibility', which he thinks Tennyson failed to understand, and which therefore made him suffer from a needless confusion of mind, will be dealt with later on. Eliot's characteristic attitude of satire towards 'the hope of the gradual and steady improvement of this world' (p. 186) will be examined in connexion with his poetry.

² *Death in the Desert*.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

met the contradiction of circumstance resolutely, and rarely, as in the *Statue and the Bust*, invoked the will of man to recondition human life, the growing concern of our age was left mainly untouched.¹ A new sense of responsibility was dawning upon the age. The sense of evil *not* being 'necessary', indeed the fact that using it as a logical necessity for good may hamper the courage of tracking it down;² the urgency, above all, of entering deeper into the correlations of existence, of lighting up as far as possible the borderline of consciousness and matter, the better to control and change existence itself, became gradually the main burden of our modern mind. Faith according to it would have to find its basis on the 'totality', and express itself even when harmony was not fully realized, in a recognition of the diversity of the operations of reality.

The tension of this new urgency assumed an acute form, though not clearly realized by him as such, in Arnold's poetry. He did not himself practise, he preached, a doctrine of self-sufficiency in Art; asking us to seek refuge in it from the tormenting perplexities of existence when the established shelters had failed to convince.³ His poetry marks an extreme

¹ Explaining the significance of the more modern attempts in poetry, and the pioneer success of Hardy's great dramatic poem, Professor Abercrombie says, '... what this poem achieves is the presenting to emotion of a metaphysical idea held in some consistent and noble shaping. And this idea is one that underlies most of the intellectual life of our time; though the shaping is altogether the poet's own. Hardy, in *The Dynasts*, attains to something that the age of Tennyson and Browning quite failed to effect' (*Thomas Hardy*, by L. Abercrombie, Secker, 1912, p. 188).

Professor Abercrombie refers to Hardy's conception of the conflict of the Will; he speaks of it in another place as 'the queer complexity of modern consciousness' (p. 202).

² Compare Hardy's statement: 'I do not see that we are likely to improve the world by asseverating, however loudly, that black is white, or at least that black is but a necessary contrast and foil without which white would be white no longer' (Hardy, quoted in *Real Conversations*, by William Archer, London, 1904, p. 46).

³ The real significance of Arnold's contribution is not often recognized. Arnold, like Wordsworth, sought an illumination of faith, in which the understanding of law in life and Nature would synchronize with moral concepts. He could not accept life as a series of unrelated values and events. Like Wordsworth, in moods of world-weariness he often fell back on wistful visions of the childhood of humanity when 'the sea of faith was . . . at the full', and the critical intellectual mind left undisturbed the innocent certitude of a complete acceptance. But his melancholy was not, as Mr. Eliot and others would have it, due to an unbelieving mind; it was an expression

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

stage, before the birth of the modern self-consciousness, and led to a break-up and the beginning of the re-integrative process in poetry. The ferment of the nineties in its struggle of consciousness defiantly developed art for art's sake—a phrase first used by Swinburne—carried purposiveness to its propagandist limit, pushed forward poetry's frontiers in all domains of life and Nature. It was in fact a period of many-sided movements proceeding from the same desire for establishing a more satisfying sense of relationships. With that ferment the poetry of to-day is intimately connected, in a practically unbroken continuity of expression.

Hardy's *The Dynasts* provides a clear statement of the modern problem; with him the idea of the Unconscious entered modern poetry. In the light of his summation the struggle of the nineties, the Symbolist and the Imagist movements, can be seen as part of a vital process in modern poetry.

§ B. THE DYNASTS as a Modern Mythology—its Intrinsic Evidence—Hardy's Denial of a Philosophical 'System'

Hardy's mythopoeic mind could enfold an entire panorama of human events, link it up with the primal forces of Nature,

of fundamental faith struggling to re-establish itself under the full scrutiny of consciousness. Expression of mere dissatisfaction he severely denounced; in removing some of his own poems (of the Empedocles series) which he perhaps wrongly thought betrayed temperamental rather than profoundly poetical moods, he said, with reference to uncreative types of melancholia, 'They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous. When they occur in actual life, they are painful, not tragic; the representation of them in poetry is painful also.'

This attitude throws light on his interpretation of poetry as criticism of life; and he was rather the pioneer of modern realistic challenge in literature, than the sceptic retiring to the citadel of art. The greatness of his contribution lay in his powerful exposition of the integrative process in poetry. To blame him as Eliot does (*The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, p. 124) for the purposive implications of his statement 'Poetry is capable of saving us . . .' and then also to attack him (*Essay on Matthew Arnold*, p. 107) for 'His tone . . . always of regret, of loss of faith, instability, nostalgia . . .' betrays a confusion of criticism which indeed reveals the nature of the central attempt, even when not successfully made, in Arnold's creative works.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

and dwell on purpose and circumstance, details of history and local traditions, without making the drama suffer from any effects of super-imposition or of deliberate allegorical intent. The fusion is complete; the Homeric sweep of the poem is finely saturated with modern psychological interpretation; the general design and the minutiae of colour and curve take in the historical perspective as naturally as they weave into a pattern the multiform strands of character, commentary, and local traditions. It moves with the momentum of a vast unfolding drive of the time-spirit; *The Dynasts* in many ways is the most lucid and cogent exposition of the mind of our Age because its illumination comes from its power of suggestion. It is not a didactic drama set upon a rationalized platform, tortured by its own purposiveness.

The Napoleonic legends had seeped through Hardy's consciousness from his early years. In listening to his grandmother's stories,¹ and acquainting his mind with oral traditions, he had laid by quite unconsciously a large accumulation of legendary and authentic material which afterwards he examined in the light of his studies at the British Museum and in other libraries. Documents connected with the dreaded invasion of the French

¹ Mrs. Hardy in her biography, vol. i (pp. 104, 105), tells us also of his contacts with old soldiers who had served at Waterloo, and of his early interest, maintained throughout his life, in the Napoleonic Wars.

Professor B. Ifor Evans remarks: 'As a child he was delicate, but so interested in books that even as a village schoolboy he discovered Dryden and Johnson and enjoyed them. Also he unearthed an old periodical which portrayed the Napoleonic wars, and so made his first contact with the theme which he was to use in *The Trumpet Major* and *The Dynasts* (*English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century*, by Prof. B. Ifor Evans, 1933, p. 178).

(Incidentally it may be remarked here that a genius akin to Hardy's, the author of *The Dawn in Britain*, has yet to come into his own in English poetry.

Britain's Muse, record [wrote Doughty]
What antique wights dwelt ere in this sweet soil;
Who kings, of sacred seed, bare o'er them rule;
What gods adored then the blue-pictured Britons . . .

(C. Doughty, *The Dawn in Britain*, 1906, London, vol. i, p. 3)

and he fulfilled his task with far more success than is generally recognized. Perhaps a summarized version, carefully edited and brought out in a handy form, will make it more readily accessible to the public and bring recognition.)

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

with their flat-bottomed boats were assiduously hunted up when his interest had become more conscious.¹ His native historical sense gained by its constant encounter with antiquities, dating back to Roman times, to Druidic monoliths and remains which litter the country-side of Dorset.² He pictured the sunken Spanish galleons thickly gathered on the floor of the 'Dead Man's Bay'. Deep brooding on human destiny had patterned all these rich deposits³ with his experience of contemporary life and thought; his poetry, therefore, like his novels, became a veritable tapestry of myth and purpose, the parallels to which can only be sought in pre-modern literature, even before Blake's time.⁴

¹ 'It is difficult, until one examines the broadsheets and other ephemeral literature of the day, to realize how great was the terror of a French descent upon these shores' (*The Wessex of Thomas Hardy*, by B. C. A. Windle, John Lane, 1902, p. 240).

Mr. Windle deals exhaustively with Hardy's use in *The Trumpet Major* of the *Proclamation to the people of England* which warned citizens of Weymouth and the neighbourhood about the danger of a French invasion.

² 'All around [him] stood, testifying to the past, . . . amphitheatres, tumuli, earth fortifications, abbeys, manor-houses, barns, inns or the residences of noblemen. And all these relics told, without explaining or justifying, of the persistent effort of humanity . . .' (*The Human Pair in the work of Thomas Hardy*, by Pierre d'Exideuil, Humphrey Toulmin, London, 1929, pp. 48, 49).

³ Professor Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch refers to Hardy's historical sense, which made him travel back through Norman, Dane, Saxon, Celt, Iberian periods into 'tribes beyond history, to the geological formations layered over by this accumulated dust' (*Studies in Literature*, by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, p. 200).

Mr. F. J. H. Darton writes in his scientific work on Wessex: 'It is at Dorchester, perhaps, more definitely than at any place in England, that this continuity is visible.' It is a town which has been a town ever since towns first were in England. Hence every race that has lived in Britain has lived [there]. . . . Referring to the local ruins of a Roman amphitheatre, Mr. Darton says: 'Its walls are Roman; in them the Roman bricks still inhere. . . . But recent excavations have shown that its circle was first cut in the Neolithic Age, and that even before that, in the dimmest antiquity, it held a deep Palaeolithic shaft . . .' (*The Marches of Wessex*, by F. J. Harvey Darton, Nisbet, London, 1922, pp. 39, 40).

Students of *The Dynasts* fascinated by the time-sense and historical perspective of Hardy's vision must also study the valuable treatise on the *Earthwork of England* by A. Hadrian Allcroft (Macmillan, 1908), in which he deals with the Hardy country (pp. 97-9, 102). Durnovaria, now Dorchester, and the Roman origins of Maiden Castle are studied in detail, though of the latter he says 'to what remoter date the first beginnings of Maiden Castle may go back no man knows' (pp. 102, 103). Some very recent excavations have thrown further light on the antiquity of these remains.

⁴ This manner of dealing wholesale with Nature and human life is described by

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

Hardy's 'philosophy', consequently, will be found in the implications, rather than in any closely elaborated doctrine. *The Dynasts*, the final fruit and major event of his creative life, should be studied as one studies the *Heimskringla*, the Arthurian, the Niamh, or the Nibelung legends; and yet, being a saga of the modern Age, a new critical sense informing its whole has to be reckoned with. Its philosophical drive is no less keen than that of Langland's *Piers Plowman*, but, as in that intuitional poem, the bare bones of logic are entirely covered over with living significances which defy philosophical labelling. In this *The Dynasts* differs from Milton's Epic which sets out deliberately to justify the ways of God to men, and, incidentally, succeeds in finally establishing Satan in literature. Not that Milton could resist mythology, indeed to a modern mind the peculiarly mythological character of his Epic seems more remote perhaps than the theological structure of Dante's great Epic, in which, as in Hardy's drama, contemporary experience was allowed freely to mix and mingle with the central theme.¹

Hardy's method, as Professor Abercrombie points out, combines psychology with the use of Chronicle play on a large scale. It is in a logical interlocking of manifold experience that

Professor Abercrombie as Hardy's 'anthropomorphic activity' (*Thomas Hardy*, by L. Abercrombie, Secker, 1912, p. 28).

¹ Milton's monumental imagination did for the classical lore what Hardy has done for the modern Age. Their minds met in the faculty both possessed of absorbing vast spheres of knowledge, of recorded fact, as well as of legends and lores, and subtle associations. In this they are not only the true creators but also preservers of tradition. As Professor Gilbert Murray remarks: 'More really significant as signs of the deep saturation of Milton's mind with the tradition of ancient poetry are the passages where there is no concrete allusion to anything classical, but only a shade of thought or feeling, or even of rhythm, which comes to the classical scholar with the inward music of the old world' (*The Classical Tradition in Poetry*, by Prof. Gilbert Murray, 1927, p. 16).

(Italics mine: the word 'saturation' is suggestive in connexion with the process of tradition in poetry; modern prescriptions for the formulation of 'ye olde' traditions, specially intended for American use, defeat their own objective. Elaborate prescriptions can be found in Mr. Eliot's writings (pp. 14-17 of *Selected Essays*), in which he stoutly defends the necessity of keeping up some sort of a link with the past; one of the methods being an 'extinction of personality', and another the concentration 'on the mind of Europe'.)

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

Hardy reveals an immense modern sense of correlatedness; his vision holds events together as 'parts of one compacted whole'.¹ This linking-up is not arbitrary, it is due to a kind of realistic mysticism which uses the most daring concept of thought, the keenest logic of the intellect, in attempting an interpretation of cosmic evolution as one indivisible process. In this he stands as the harbinger of the modern Age in poetry.²

Speaking of Langland, Mr. N. K. Coghill says:³ '... In *Piers Plowman* no human relationship is thought of as an isolated

¹ What are Space and Time? A fancy!—
Lo! by Vision's necromancy
Muscovy will now unroll;

Though such features lie afar
From events Peninsular,
These, amid their dust and thunder,
Form with those, as scarce asunder,
Parts of one compacted whole.

(*The Dynasts*, III. i. 3.)

Events happening in different zones during the Napoleonic upheaval are seen as manifestations of the same process. Repeatedly in *The Dynasts* Hardy gives us this composite feeling of totality which owing to the present stage of our understanding we must yet mainly realize as a feeling rather than as revealed understanding. The originality of Hardy's contribution in lighting up new significances of knowledge has yet to gain general recognition.

² Long before Hardy began writing *The Dynasts* the idea of presenting a co-ordinated spectacle of life in which Reason and the emotions would be shown in action and interaction was being formulated in his mind. In 1881 (May 9), he writes in his diary about his 'trying to reconcile a scientific view of life with the emotional and spiritual' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. i, p. 192). Not that his philosophy as he consciously elaborated it, or even in its implications, offers satisfying completeness, but the nature of his attempt is significant. He was all the time trying to unite the idea of evolution in Nature—an unpurposive process according to Reason, as he would say—with the existence of human feelings, with human life itself. Much later in life, in 1915, in a letter to Dr. Saleeby he brings up this idea of a synthesis, of the need of interpreting the whole cosmic process as one, and not being satisfied with categories, even if differences in the process of existence seemed to be irreconcilable. Protesting against Bergson's statement about 'the enormous gap that separates even the lowest form of life from the organic world', Hardy writes, 'it is more probable that organic and inorganic modulate into each other, one nature and law operating throughout'. In this striving to unite the material and the moral, life and non-life, and find out the basic principles of existence Hardy betrayed a psychological attitude which, as the effect of modern physics and evolutionary philosophy, is specially characteristic of post-War poetry.

³ p. xv in the Introduction to *The Vision of Piers Plowman* translated by Henry W. Wells, Oxford University Press, 1935.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

thing in itself; for Langland all dealings between people are functions of a prior relationship with God—and have eternal consequences that cannot be evaded.' By substituting the word 'Will' or 'the Unconscious' for 'God' we would come close to the character of *The Dynasts*. But it is important to stress the curious blend of imagination with a philosophical theme in *The Dynasts* which makes it a modern mythology. The sense of 'prior relationships' is constant throughout Hardy's drama; the human relationships by themselves cannot tell the whole story. The drama of creation must be shown by the poet with the actors appearing in what to him is a proper order of relationship, so that we may begin to understand the meaning. The primal Unconscious; the consciousness of animal and man; reason and compassion, emerge as manifestations of some yet unrevealed urge of existence.

Hardy's drama is allegorical, but in the modern sense. Speaking of *Piers Plowman*, Mr. Coghill remarks:¹

'Allegory is not a mere trick of writing, a device to twist simple stories into moral shapes; it is not even excogitated in separate pieces and then assembled like a motor car; it is the form of thought and poetry that arises from the deep intuition of the seamless coat of the Universe. . . . Experience in such a Universe is full of meanings, for lesser things are microcosms of greater, and meditation will bring the understanding of one problem to light by the looking-glass of another. This gift of transferred and simultaneous thinking has something of the qualities of metaphor and parable; the manifest meaning is a type of secondary meanings, which in the end are seen to be the richer, the more important. But just as they were not imagined in separate pieces by the poet, but imagined simultaneously on all planes of meaning at once, so they cannot be understood analytically by the reader but synthetically.'

Modern poetry, beginning with Hardy's *The Dynasts*, bears out the truth of the allegorical intent brilliantly stated here. The difference lies in the fact that most of the problems of

¹ Ibid., p. xvi.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

existence have in our day been driven to a more conscious plane than before—this process of self-consciousness goes on—and where the ancient allegory moved in a dream-like maze led by mysterious illuminations and direct spiritual signs and divinations, a drama like *The Dynasts* applies the new accesses of mind to light up the intricate architecture of existence. It registers, in this, a continuation of Dante's attempt to focus the whole of his knowledge (for instance, of astronomy) to reveal the workings of the divine drama.¹

It has been necessary to dwell on this mythopoeic character of *The Dynasts* because otherwise we may be led to examine it either as a philosophical system or as a narrative, whereas in *The Dynasts* both processes meet in a curious imaginative fusion. Such methods of analysis may tend 'to constrict and prevent that fluidity of meanings which . . . are everywhere in ambience',² and as post-War poetry shares the character of Hardy's drama, perhaps a new approach to the latter will be necessary in order that the contemporary trend can be clearly recognized.

Unfortunately Hardy himself had on occasions made his fundamental position as a poet obscure by offering extra-poetic explanations and commentaries on free will, Nature, Conscious-

¹ e.g. Dante often speaks metaphorically about planetary motion and the central axle of fixity which must co-ordinate the movements—of 'Her eyes fix'd on the eternal wheels' (*Paradise*, canto I, p. 294, Cary's translation), of the 'Wheel which Thou dost ever guide . . . with its harmony' (p. 294), of 'spheres on firm-set poles revolving', and

as wheels that wind
Their circles in the horologe so work
The stated rounds, that to the observant eye
The first seems still, and as it flew, the last

(canto XXIV, p. 399).

There are other attempts to explain the paradox of simultaneous stillness and motion in terms of astronomical knowledge. When, however, a close student of Dante, Mr. Eliot to-day speaks repeatedly in his latest drama, as well as in his new poem *Burnt Norton*, of 'the still point of the changing world', of fixity and motion together, he implies a knowledge of relativist physics; the paradox, for him, is to be spiritually resolved, but it has become also more easy to accept it in the light of modern theories of astro-physics.

² Introduction to *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, p. xvi.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

ness, &c., either provoked by adverse criticism, or moved by some new mood through which he saw his own works.¹ Some of his spontaneous remarks provide a clue to his poetry, and those will have to be kept apart from the quick reactions in which, specially in the War-embittered years, he tried to justify himself, and contradicted his own intuitions.² It must also be noted that in various letters and introductions to his poems,³ and in his introduction to *The Dynasts* itself, he tried to make it clear that his idea was not to enunciate a philosophy of consciousness nor to conduct a logical exposition of a particular attitude; his philosophy lies in the accumulated evidence of the suggestions that the drama presents to us.

That he was influenced by his reading of philosophy, especially late in life, by the works of Schopenhauer, we know from his

¹ Hardy himself realized that many of his passing observations, made in course of conversation or recorded in writings that had not been fully elaborated, contradicted each other; Mrs. Hardy mentions this as 'a fact of which we are reminded by his frequent remarks on the tentative character of his theories' (*The Early Life of Thomas Hardy*, by Florence Hardy, p. viii). See note *.

² With regard to the 'philosophy' of *The Dynasts*, Hardy sometimes alternated between rather extreme statements; he would deny any philosophy when critics disagreed with the implications of the drama; and, again, he would often claim to have put forward a definitely modern philosophy which was not appreciated because it was so new. The two following quotations from his diary are relevant:

(a) 'I have handicapped myself by expressing, both in this drama and previous verse, philosophies and feelings as yet not well established' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 104).

(b) Again, in answer to Courtney's article on *The Dynasts* in the *Fortnightly* in which Hardy's philosophy was severely criticized, Hardy altogether avoids controversy by writing, 'I have repeatedly stated . . . that the views . . . are *seemings*, provisional impressions only used for artistic purposes . . .' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 175).

³ e.g. in his letter to Alfred Noyes (quoted in *Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 218), and his Introduction to *Late Lyrics and Earlier Hardy* reveals his exasperation when driven to 'explain' and reduce to a system his profound poetical intuitions. This proves that above all he was a poet; his poems had to illustrate, in an organic form, that is to say in the form of the poems themselves, the truths which they existed to express. One can legitimately wonder what Shakespeare would have said if besieged by moderns to enunciate the philosophy of Hamlet. It must not be forgotten that he called one of his plays *As You Like It*, when presenting it to his public, who might have needlessly puzzled themselves about it and missed its holiday humour.

* The two volumes of biography by Mrs. Hardy are referred to elsewhere as *Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vols. i, ii.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

remarks, and much has been written of his indebtedness to the German philosopher. Even Nietzsche, for some part of whose philosophy he expressed appreciation, but against whose doctrines of despotic power and hero-worship Hardy's life-work can indeed be proclaimed to be the most consistent and the most formidable testimony in literature, has been offered as 'explanation' of Hardy's inspiration. It is not possible, nor necessary in this short survey, to discuss the various interpretations of Hardy's poetry based on its supposed dependence on Schopenhauer's philosophy which, especially in America, have been plentifully produced in recent years. It is sufficient, perhaps, to note how even writers convinced of their thesis have had constantly to reconsider their position. In his book *Thomas Hardy's Universe* Mr. Brennecke admits that Hardy's philosophy of life has been shaped independently of Schopenhauer. He says: 'Mr. Edmund Gosse, it is true, in a letter to Mr. Hedgcock (*Thomas Hardy, Penseur et Artiste*, Hachette, Paris, 1909, p. 499), has denied the possibility that Schopenhauer exercised any influence on Hardy's work before 1874; and it is perfectly believable that the broad outlines of his philosophy . . . were developed in complete independence of . . . Schopenhauer.'¹ Brennecke himself shows with the help of ample quotations from Hardy's novels how his fundamental ideas of will and consciousness are to be found interspersed from the very beginning of his writings.

It is contended here that not only Hardy's own reiterated statements which Brennecke ignores, but also the implications of his intuitive philosophy trace for us the gradual unfolding of consciousness in creation—a poetic vision radically different from Schopenhauer's philosophy of complete negation.² Specially is this true of his mature work, *The Dynasts*,

¹ *Thomas Hardy's Universe*, by Ernest Brennecke, London, 1924, p. 14.

² Brennecke quotes Schopenhauer's saying: 'The Will is Aimless. Therefore Pessimism is the only adequate estimate of life.' Hardy never lost an opportunity to refute the charge of 'pessimism' and to state his belief in the melioristic principle.

The fundamental difference between Schopenhauer's and Hardy's outlooks perhaps

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

and some of his later poems where Hardy's intuitions were being more consciously elaborated. No theory of fortuitous happenings could be fitted into Hardy's drama, without ignoring not only its basic neutrality but also some of its expressions of faith. Brennecke in trying to identify Hardy with Schopenhauer has constantly to make reservations:¹

'One almost feels that Hardy himself joins in the final general chorus of the Intelligences with which the work with all its gloom is brought to a conclusion in a brilliant major-chord. . . . The third and final line of thought that seems to point toward an ultimate hope is still less in keeping with the general tenor of the rest of the Hardy philosophy. This is the prospect of the gradual improvement to be brought about by the conscious and directed efforts of men.'

Brennecke also quotes from William Archer's *Real Conversations*, and though he strangely leaves out the direct statements of Hardy on his faith, the belief in perfectibility implied in some of his remarks is commented upon: 'This seems to suggest a disregard for the fundamental philosophy expressed in his

lies in the fact that Schopenhauer's philosophy is pre-Darwinian, whereas Hardy's thought was definitely moulded by the conception of evolution. Pierre d'Exideuil refers to this in an appendix to his book, though he does not seem to have realized its full significance in his own estimate of Hardy's attitude. He says (*The Human Fair in the Work of Thomas Hardy*, Humphrey Toulmin, London, 1929, p. 209): 'Between Schopenhauer and Hardy, as between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, stands Darwin, the channel whereby meliorism, the idea of the greatest possible enriching and perfecting of life, reaches the poet of *The Dynasts* and the hero of *Zarathustra*. Life, therefore, may become its own aim, whereas Schopenhauer stopped short with the denial of any final aim.'

Havelock Ellis in his Introduction to d'Exideuil's book remarks: 'It is common to speak of Thomas Hardy as a "pessimist"'. It is not a description he himself accepted. One may well go further and say that for anyone who is concerned with the spectacle of life the term "pessimism" is as much out of place as the term "optimism". . . . The artist lifts us into a region where these metaphysical distinctions are meaningless, and we may well feel sorry for the simple folk who can turn from the radiant exhilaration of Hardy's art and mutter "Pessimist!"'

One wonders whether 'radiant exhilaration' would be a proper adjective for all of Hardy's works or for the general trend of his thought, but the point that Ellis makes here is valid.

¹ *Thomas Hardy's Universe*, by Ernest Brennecke, pp. 144, 145.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

imaginative work.'¹ Again, Brennecke finds one of the best-known poems of Hardy, *On a Fine Morning*, puzzling. In that poem occur the lines

Thus do I this heyday, holding
Shadows but as lights unfolding,
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.
.
.
.
.
... as nothing other than
Part of a benignant plan;
Proof that earth was made for man

which are surely not in keeping with Schopenhauer's philosophy.

Helen Garwood's treatise sets out to prove that Hardy's stories and poems are an embodiment in literary form of Schopenhauer's philosophical doctrines.² But it is hoped that the following pages will strengthen the contradictions which Dr. Garwood fails to reconcile, and that a different approach to Hardy's poetry may be made justifiable. Hardy's conception of tragedy, of conflict in life and in Nature, his psychological intuitions as well as his sure grasp on the movements in modern science, will be analysed as an expression of his poetic faith. His unflinching realism, which discerned in the most humble of life's struggles, in its triumphs as well as in its failures and

¹ *Thomas Hardy's Universe*, by Ernest Brennecke, p. 146.

It would be well to remember Hardy's statement (*Real Conversations*, William Archer, pp. 46, 47): '... But my pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs, and that Ahriman is winning all along the line. On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist.'

The following entry in Hardy's diary (Feb. 1882) is significant in this connexion; in devising a framework for *The Dynasts*, he says: 'Write a history . . . of human action in spite of human knowledge, showing how very far conduct lags behind the knowledge that should really guide it' (italics mine) (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. i, p. 197).

This observation indicates that for Hardy the problem in *The Dynasts* was not that human knowledge and power are entirely missing in the 'process' but that they do not yet guide human affairs—with the result that wars and cruelty go on.

² *Thomas Hardy*, by Helen Garwood. *An Illustration of the Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, thesis for the University of Pennsylvania, 1911. And yet Dr. Garwood refers to the letter Hardy wrote to her in which he spoke of his indebtedness to Schopenhauer 'indirectly' through 'later philosophers' (p. 43).

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

sufferings, a pattern of ceaseless effort, will then be given its due place.¹

The dominant note in *The Dynasts* is perhaps most clearly recognizable in a poem written before 1901 and published in *Poems Past and Present*. It is not an affirmation of hope, or of belief in a purpose; it is a Shakespearian representation of the coexistence of good and evil, blind as well as conscious forces, cruelty as well as tenderness, in an unending pageantry of life. 'Long have I framed weak phantasies of Thee . . .' he says, in that poem, invoking the creative principle in Nature,

Who makest Life become
As though by labouring all-unknowingly . . .

Conscious of the limitations of our human mind, we must admit that much is yet dark to our understanding,

How much of consciousness informs Thy will
· · · · ·
Nought shows us ephemeral ones who fill
But moments in Thy mind. . . .

But as we understand the workings of reality even our logical mind begins to realize that, 'perhaps',

Thy ancient rote-restricted ways
Thy ripening rule transcends;

that, in the world as we know it here, through the whole of

¹ In Annie Macdonnell's excellent monograph on Hardy (*Thomas Hardy*, London, 1894) written in the nineties, this point, fully developed later on by prominent English critics, has been finely made. 'The troubles of men he will not always treat as sordid maladies, but as honourable scars, "misères de grand seigneur". He has laughed at human nature, but he has never belittled it.' She quoted (p. 217) Hardy's words that even at a low level human nature is 'neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither common-place, unmeaning, nor tame, but . . . slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious'.

In p. 212 of her book the author remarks: 'The tragic, his deepest note, is furthest of all from the cynical, for it recognizes in the fragile, battered thing called life the stirrings and impulses of greatness.'

Hardy's own remark is relevant: 'The business of the poet . . . is to show the sorriest underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things . . .' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. i, p. 223).

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

creation there might be traced a certain movement of consciousness, a hint that Nature tends

To grow percipient with advance of days,
And with percipience mends. . . .

It is this principle of percipience on which our reasoning intellect builds its hope; for with percipience comes the sense of right and wrong, of values, of feelings and the intimations of final truth; in unconscious Nature there can be no implications of this kind. It is not that percipience has yet 'mended' the human world;¹ wrong remains, and the struggle with it remains; but already one sees the operation, as it were, of a higher principle—evil, here and there, in a universe where other forces are at work, seems to die of its own inherent unreality:

For, in unwonted purlicus, far and nigh,
At whiles or short or long,
May be discerned a wrong
Dying as of self-slaughter; . . .²

This is a hope in which faith is sustained by a new attitude towards an evolutionary principle of Consciousness; by a recognition of the possibility at least of a more rational existence.

Whereat I,
says the poet,
Would raise my voice in song.

¹ Cf. 'The Great Adjustment is taking place'—quoted on p. 330, Appendix II; also other verses from Hardy referred to in the same section.

² Compare Hardy's statement in his diary (Feb. 18, 1886): 'Remember that Evil dies as well as Good' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. i, p. 73).

Here it may be mentioned that the difficulty in attributing any final philosophical attitude to an artist like Hardy is that he so often speaks 'in character'—in his poems, and more so in *The Dynasts*—not to mention his novels. One can but guess, and balance the different implications of his most characteristic writings. To deny him any faith, or even an ardent faith, but a faith arising out of the depths of his unique temperament, would be extremely dangerous. One of his later poems, in *Moments of Vision*, throws a curious light on his attitude. One may treat this poem, *For Life I Had Never Cared Greatly* (*Moments of Vision*, by Thomas Hardy, London, 1917, pp. 221, 222), as a merely imaginative piece or delineation of a mood, but there is

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

§ C. *THE DYNASTS and the Evolution of the Will*

The Dynasts, in spite of its discursiveness and panoramic scope, reveals an unmistakable poetic principle, a unity of vision and of interpretation of life and nature. The themes touched upon are multitudinous, leading to theories of State, social history, military manœuvres, reflections on human character, psychological conflicts of well-known figures of history—an adequate analysis of the drama, therefore, would be altogether beyond the limits of this survey. The myth-making faculty which enabled Hardy to weave so many different strands into a composite arrangement has been noted. The philosophy of Consciousness, so far as it can at all be reduced to a philosophy, as well as its original motif, its evolutionary idea, which differs fundamentally from Schopenhauer's system, has been referred to.¹ But the real approach to the drama, as an organic creation,

a strongly personal note about it which perhaps deserves serious consideration. A time came, he says in this poem, when isolation from life seemed unjustifiable—'evasions seemed wrong', and the poet therefore joined in life's fray, though without any purpose or vision before him:

Anew I found nought to set eyes on . . .

—and then something happened; Life, which had seemed barren,

. . . lifting its hand

It uncloaked a star,

Uncloaked it from fog-damps afar,

And showed its beams burning from pole to horizon

As bright as a brand.

He continues:

And so, the rough highway forgetting,

I pace hill and dale

Regarding the sky,

Regarding the vision on high,

And thus re-illumed have no humour for letting

My pilgrimage fail.

What was the nature of his vision, or of his pilgrimage? Did he himself know? Are his own *opinions* of much value in yielding the secret? It is difficult to give any answer; but perhaps the total inner evidence of his works, if we can evaluate it properly, may give us the essential of his experience which necessarily formed the core of his belief.

¹ Hardy's own statements can be held conclusive. 'That the Unconscious Will of the Universe is growing aware of Itself I believe I may claim as my own idea solely—at which I arrived by reflecting that what has already taken place in a fraction of the

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

can be made if we follow Hardy's advice¹ and try to realize the drama as a whole, as an imaginative projection which works its way from one part to the other and builds up its own universe of thought and feeling.

What then, in terms of feeling and effort, and as reflecting the characteristic tendencies of our age, is the meaning of *The Dynasts*? This is the question which we have to answer.

The modern mind, it has been suggested, is struggling to establish a new synthesis, it has to solve the problem of correlating its controlling powers to the particular responsibilities of civilization which have been forced upon it. The idea that there is, somehow, a principle of opposition involved between mind and matter, man's will and his desires, law and freedom, is as old as human thought. The nineteenth century, owing to its increased knowledge of the workings of Nature from the atom to the depths of space, from physiology to the fringes of the new psychology, more richly than ever substantiated the sense of incompatibilities, as well as the need of a comprehensive application of the evolutionary theory. Even though evil, or breaks in the chain, appeared to them, generally speak-

whole (i.e. so much of the world as has become conscious) is likely to take place in the mass . . .' (Note in diary, June 2, 1907, quoted in *Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 125).

Hardy in the same page refers to his independent use of terms. 'I believe, too, that the Prime Cause, this Will, has never before been called "It" in any poetical literature, English or foreign.'

It is important to note that Freud's *The Ego and The Id* was published as late as 1923; Hardy was working on that idea from 1895 to 1908.

Freud's conception of the Id, however, deals with 'the unconscious reservoir of instinctual urges' in each individual; he does not apply to it any general evolutionary principle for his own interpretation of existence. As Flugel says: 'In this book [*The Ego and The Id*] Freud . . . divided the mind into three main parts, the (conscious) Ego, the Id (the subconscious), and the super-ego (the moral elements)' (*A Hundred Years of Psychology*, by J. C. Flugel, London, 1933). In terms of Freudian psychology, roughly speaking, the conscious Ego would correspond to the Spirit of the Years, the Id to the continuum of the blind forces which unites the instincts with Nature, and whose actions are the main theme of the drama; the Super-Ego would perhaps be the Spirit of the Pities.

¹ 'A writer's works should be judged as a whole, and not from passages that contradict them as a whole. . . .' (From Hardy's letter, *Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 216.)

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

ing, as inevitable to life, or as being due to direct interventions and imposed impediments which disproved material law and reason, the Victorian poets were already conscious of new possibilities of interpretation.

Darwin's Evolution had virtually stopped at man's appearance on the stage; the evolution of consciousness evidently had to be the starting-point for a restatement of the entire process of matter and life and mind.¹ The apparent anomalies in life, the baffling upheavals that occur in our individual as well as national history, the subtle dependence between the different planes of existence, had to find a unity in a seer's vision. The vision of the late Victorian Age was clouded by doubt; the traditional assertions of faith already seemed slightly unreal. But the modern criticism of life had not yet begun to transform the texture of poetry.

Wars, for instance, if not accepted were tolerated in poetry, not only because of their associations with noble sacrifice, and the natural human impulses of patriotism and power, but because brutality and the utter futility of wars seemed to form a part of inscrutable destiny along with cataclysms of Nature with which the human mind could not negotiate, and which therefore, paradoxically, it had to accept and even idealize. Wars were a part of 'necessary evil'; and instead of attempting to stop fratricide, much as the finest poets always detested it, they had often to gild it instead of showing up its reality. Indeed, the whole problem of poetry and war provides a standard for testing the sensibilities of an age.²

¹ Hardy had so completely assimilated the theory of evolution and harmonized it with an increase of sensibility that he based thereupon the conception of morality itself not only in relation to man, but to the entire world of conscious, sentient beings. In a letter written in 1909 he says: 'The discovery of the law of evolution, which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 138). Hardy supplied *values* to the law of evolution and made it enter literature as part of the general problem of consciousness. (See Middleton Murry's *Aspects of Literature* for penetrating remarks on Hardy's poetry of deeper consciousness.)

² Wordsworth applied this test and found the evidence of a growth in humanity,

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

Hardy launched the modern Age in poetry by applying the principle of human consciousness as far as possible to all his experiences, and sensitized it to an entire range of phenomena in a psychological manner not used in poetry before him. No facts of life, evil, hurtful, baffling, or wholesome, were seen as unrelated to each other; a poet's vision had to take in the whole, an attempt had to be made to trace a coherent principle running through the whole of history, through good and evil, through different levels of being, in a manner that would satisfy the rational imagination.

The drama of *The Dynasts* is the drama of human consciousness, in which disruptive forces are at work; a part or quality of this consciousness detests these forces and tries to check them, or at least hopes they may be checked, but it cannot control them. Napoleon's blind energy is challenged by the heroism of Nelson,¹ who, even if his methods are those of war, and often unavailing, believes in a moral purpose, and stands for justice. We are shown a titanic storm of the prime forces of Nature, and the torment of self-consciousness, itself a product of the former. Evil is struggling with itself, it is no longer free from some incipient germs of self-criticism; the events, good and bad, involve the comments and reactions of reason, and of the emotions. All the wars on the European

even if for him the growth was not rapid enough. 'What excessive admiration was paid in former times to personal prowess and military success. It is so with the latter even at the present day, but surely not nearly so much as heretofore' (letter to Wilson).

¹ Nelson's words are memorable:

We must henceforth
Trust to the Great Disposer of events,
And justice of our cause. . . .

(Part I, Act v, Scene 2, p. 85.)

Hardy (as he mentions in the Preface to *The Dynasts*) wanted to do justice to the part played by the English in the Napoleonic Wars; he felt that this had not been satisfactorily done in any previous account. There is no doubt that the characters of Nelson, Pitt, Fox, for example (and those are widely different from each other), were of quite a different order from that of the megalomaniac tyrant seized by a destructive frenzy, even though both parties are engaged in brutal fratricide.

Fox, as will be seen later on, refers to principles and reasons which are not circum-

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

continent, the tussle between the individual wills of king and commoner, of nation and nation, are enveloped within a single drama of consciousness.

The 'Spirits'

The 'Spirits' which comment on and react to the historical events and also give them a motive and direction are not extra-human, but the attributes of the mind. In this Hardy differs somewhat from the idea of the Greek chorus, which was mainly a commentary on circumstance from one general attitude towards life, either from the outside of it or as belonging to one side or the other at a time. The 'Spirits' work simultaneously; they work within the normal range of human emotion and intellect; no preference is shown to any one aspect of the total human personality, or any one attitude, whether sinister or ironic, detached or purely sympathetic. If any significance attaches to any particular quality of the human consciousness it is perhaps to the function of reason, as recording events in time; the other aspect emphasized is the 'Spirit' sympathetic—the Pities—referred to as the youngest and the

scribed by narrow national interests; he shows the refinement of his nature when in speaking of his opponent, whose frenzy nothing seemed to check, he remarks:

But we see
Good reason still to hope that broadening views,
Politer wisdom, now are helping him
To saner guidance of his arrogant car.

(Part II, Act I, Scene I, p. 145.)

Fox, one of the characters in *The Dynasts*, had not lost his 'hope that broadening views' may yet prevail.

W. R. Rutland lays proper emphasis on the character of Pitt in quoting Pitt's famous speech which ends with the lines:

England has saved herself, by her exertions:
She will, I trust, save Europe by her example!
(*The Dynasts*, Part I, Act v, Scene 5, p. 103; quoted in *Thomas Hardy*, by W. R. Rutland. A lecture at Lausanne, Jan. 14, 1932.)

Even if there is often a tinge of self-complacency in Pitt's remarks, quite evidently they spring from a sensible and honourable nature.

In judging the trend of 'belief' in *The Dynasts* as a whole, these characters have to be fully taken into account.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

latest development in the process.¹ In visualizing the drama of reality with all the attributes of the human make-up in full operation, Hardy shows a peculiar poetic justice which is in keeping with the modernist outlook.² In the *application* of the values gained by consciousness and in the attempt to find out through poetic realization the methods whereby the creative process may be helped forward, the modern poets, generally speaking, have gone farther than Hardy; but the object of *The Dynasts* was restricted to *presenting* the fundamental problems of consciousness and elucidating them by vivid characterization and example, which is the most necessary step towards working out a solution.

The full significance of Hardy's attempt can be realized if the function of the Spirits and of the obvious actors in the drama is considered in unison; some have left out the part played by the former as subsidiary, taking the narrative as complete in itself; while others have evolved popular doctrines by distilling fragmentary utterances of the 'Spirits'.³ But Hardy's *The Dynasts* is a plenum; no part of it can move without affecting the others; the Spirits and the actions work out the general law and inform it with profound significance.⁴

¹ An Australian admirer wrote to Hardy: 'The Spirit of the Pities is indeed young in comparison with the Years, so we must be patient.' This remark seems to have pleased Hardy (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 128).

² Hardy wanted to find a balance between dry logic and emotionalism—in his diary he writes: 'Rationalists err as far in one direction as Revelationists or Mystics in the other' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 121).

³ One of the usual forms of misrepresentation frequently seen in American criticism of Hardy as the 'Arch-Pessimist in Literature' is to make practically no differentiation between the Spirits themselves, and to quote their words as interchangeable tickets any of which can be used for travelling to one's particular theory about Hardy's attitude. Instances of this are too numerous to need particular references.

⁴ Lionel Johnson realized the nature of Hardy's mind when, as early as 1894, he wrote his brilliant book on *The Art of Thomas Hardy*. He saw how Hardy used hosts of characters and events to orchestrate on a fundamental theme. Of these characters, he says, 'far from being picturesque accessories, they form the chorus whose office is to insist upon the stable moralities, the tried wisdom and experience, with which the fortunes of the chief actors are in contrast' (p. 134).

Johnson here indicates the real function of the Chorus of the Spirits in *The Dynasts*, which yet had to be written. In the unity of Hardy's conception alone lies the direction of its meaning.

§ D. *Fore-Scene*

The Fore-Scene opens with a poetic statement of the principles of reason, and of feeling, which constitute the human mind. At one end of feeling are the 'Spirits Sinister', which in some queer way are in harmony with the mindless upheavals of Nature. At the other end are the 'Tender Mercies',¹ which have not yet fully seen life, which feel and falter,² are bruised by the impact of experience and yet constantly try to encompass, rationalize, and explain purposively the whole of reality according to their own sense of perfection. The 'Spirits Ironical' are swayed by sympathy as well as by an effort to be neutral in responding to actuality without complications of human purposiveness. The connecting link between the vast Unconscious, the Prime Cause, the *It*, whose working-out of the drama of human destiny is shown in the concourse of events, and the Principle of Consciousness—the human story itself—is supplied by the 'Spirit of the Years'. The Spirit of the Years is the rational principle, objectively recording facts as they happen and placing them in time sequence with the facts that have happened before. It has no business to draw any conclusions or to forecast events.³ It can merely note the changes in the historical process as they become known. Any admission, therefore, by the Spirit of the Years of the fact of the emergence of changes, which are not only changes in the logical sequence but in the *quality* or *nature* of facts, would be the most strictly logical measure of Hardy's poetic conception of the nature, validity, and the *value* of human experience.

¹ Cf.— Pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, and Heaven's cherubin horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air.

(*Macbeth*.)

² Speaking of the group of the Pities, Hardy says that it 'approximates to the Universal Sympathy of human nature . . . it is impressionable and inconsistent in its views . . .' (Preface to *The Dynasts*, p. ix).

³ Mercy I view, nor urge; nor more than mark
What designate your titles Good and Ill

says the Years to the Pities (p. 4, Fore-Scene).

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

We shall see that Hardy's treatment goes farther than modernist poetry does in its psychological analysis of the human drama. There is no attempt in it to shirk the problems of consciousness by legitimate or illegitimate retreat into the realm of pure feeling, by lapsing into the subconscious, or by reducing values to abstract concepts which ignore experience and reduce life into unreality. As Hardy has confessed, he has sometimes failed scrupulously to preserve the logic of the Spirits, but the astonishing fact which emerges is that though all the historical interludes are not properly fused into perspective nor his full powers used in the delineation of individual characters—it seems he was determined not to give Hardy the novelist some supreme chances of his life—the varying strands of human consciousness and of Nature are shown with singularly unchanging clarity as they knit and unknit in a drama of destiny.

The constant background is that of the immense Unconscious, working as ever

Eternal artistries in Circumstance,
Whose patterns, wrought by wrapt aesthetic rotè,
Seem in themselves Its single listless aim
And not their consequence. . . .

By using the very word *consequence* the Spirit of the Years in a way suggests the possibility of consequence, and the Pities in chorus immediately ask, as we moderns would ask, as conscious man indeed has always queried Nature in some way or other,

Still thus? Still thus?
Ever unconscious!

—the new principle of mind cannot understand why there should be this immense phenomenon of the unconscious in Nature, which, by not yet being sensitive to values, comes again and again in its blind operations into a clash with our own tentative efforts. This duality has to be properly

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

understood, in order that our reading of the process of reality can at all correspond to the truth. Hardy does not take sides, he merely depicts the clash between the two principles, the Prime Cause, weaving mere 'will-webs' of event and the human consciousness which paradoxically is born out of the process, and suffers and rends itself in strife and dissension.

Is there any hint of a higher hope or purpose? The Spirit of the Years cannot admit it; there is no evidence that the Unconscious is swayed by considerations such as humanity would like to guide it. And yet the strange process of chance and change goes on, and in the course of cosmic evolution events have happened which even Reason cannot quite reconcile with the old, inexorable laws of Nature that still hold the field:

Already change
Hath played strange pranks since first I brooded here,
But old Laws operate yet.

Reason cannot go farther. Evidently in our world, especially in the sphere of mass-action, the unpurposive blind operations of natural forces continue in spite of the spirit of compassion or of any desire to plan a rational existence that may guide individual men. But of this latter Hardy does not speak; the Spirit of the Years says:

 phase and phase
Of men's dynastic and imperial moils
Shape on accustomed lines.

The activities of

A Brain whose whole connotes the Everywhere

—there is, according to the Years, no humane Will behind it—operates merely according to clock-work arrangement. And yet the activities of this total Brain of the Nature-Process can be watched by 'phantom eyes like ours'; evidently contained

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

in the totality are individual units which are 'function-free' within strict limitations:

They subsist but atoms of the One
Labouring through all, divisible from none. . . .

The question arises as to whether we can help this process of 'labouring' to our purpose. Hardy does not directly answer this question, he stresses the negative side rather than that of hope, but the important thing is that he clearly shows us that tragedy arises because when we think we are, as human beings, applying our consciousness to control, direct, and even help the emergent principle of Nature, we are most often merely acting as blind instruments of a blind Will; even the so-called masterful personalities like Napoleon are, contrary to popular conception, against the principle of Nature-becoming-conscious; in fact, they can only sacrifice human consciousness to the mercies of blind forces. If it were a mere clash between mindless forces, without any principle of consciousness involved, if it were a storm rolling a block of mountain into the sea or a volcano erupting in a desert waste, then such a cataclysm would have no tragic significance for us. But it is because human consciousness comes into the story that tragedy and pain arise.

This idea has been expressed in a modern psychological form, with a full cognizance of the modifications that the evolution theory itself has undergone. Nature, human life, human self-consciousness are shown as stages in the same process. As Professor Abercrombie has written, in his work on Hardy, cosmic forces are shown as 'engaging' the principle of the human mind.¹ In order that humanity can progress at all, can save itself from clashing blindly under the influence of the mindless will, and prevent such phenomena as wars and the repeated break-down of civilization, the most important point

¹ 'We never feel the characters to be isolated in a purely human world; the conditions of their being, and their being itself, are always *engaged* (as Hardy's architectural language might put it) with an immense background of measureless fatal processes, a moving, supporting darkness more or less apparent; it may be only hinted at, but it is always to be felt' (*Thomas Hardy*, by L. Abercrombie, Secker, 1912, p. 27).

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

is not merely to try to exploit Nature's resources scientifically, but to know clearly the difference, in our own human sphere, between the conscious will and the inconscient will now called the subconscious; for the latter can upset the whole balance if it is not controlled and released by the former. This is the line of development that Hardy's idea has followed—his idea of the Unconscious and the reactions of human consciousness—as we trace it farther in post-War poetry.

Let us see how the great Emperor Napoleon, the Arch-Dictator and the prototype of militarists and the idol of weak-willed hero-worshippers, fares under Hardy's poetic reason. At the very beginning of the drama the Spirit of the Years points to that strutting figure and says:

You'll mark the twitchings of this Bonaparte
As he with other figures foots his reel¹

—a mere dancing figure on the screen.

Also regard the frail ones that his flings
Have made gyrate like animalcula.

The Spirit of Pity had expressed its own sense of the futility of this unprincipled power and wished that

We would establish those of kindlier build,
In fair Compassion skilled,
Men of deep art in life-development;
Watchers and warders of their varied lands²

—those who will not lay 'heavy hands upon the innocent' and

Those, too, who love the true, the excellent,
And make their daily moves a melody.

But tenderness by itself does not know how to make the perfect poetic justice operate in human civilization. It must suffer and know, and through the whole spectacle of the Napoleonic Wars it is shown the clash of will-forces, the multitudinous harmonies and disharmonies which, for the lack of a creative control, repeatedly plunge creation into utter discord.

¹ p. 6, Fore-Scene.

² p. 3, Fore-Scene.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

In the Fore-Scene Hardy with masterly compression deals with the whole scope of human questioning in the face of disaster; and prepares us for the drama by evoking through the Spirits the different elements of our conscious nature. The Time Spirit, as we have seen, has spoken of an impending blind show of will-driven automata. The Spirit of the Earth, which depicts worldly wisdom, offers an excellent argument at the beginning of Act I. It cannot understand why if phenomena should be so meaningless they should happen at all; all these problems of existence 'could be shunned by uncreation'.¹ 'The governance of these massed mortalities' which seem so pitiable could thus be prevented.

A juster wisdom his who should have ruled
They had not been.

But the Spirit of the Years itself has to admit:

Nay, something hidden urged
The giving matter motion. . . .

'And these coils', who knows, 'are, maybe, as good as any.'
'Why any?' asks the Spirit of the Pities—to this Reason cannot answer, and yet it cannot deny the validity of the question, saying:

Sprite of Compassions, ask the Immanent!
I am but an accessory of Its works,
Whom the Ages render conscious. . . .

The Years can

at most

Figure as bounden witness to Its laws,

and record facts as they are recognized by the conscious principle.

Reason does not claim to be able to explain the meaning of the process; it is neither fatalistic as to the future, nor can it offer any hope; in that sense Hardy's drama itself is concerned to represent all sides and not to draw a moral conclusion. It is neither an elaboration of a dark doctrine of despair, nor is it

¹ Part I, Act I, Scene 2, p. 15.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

a beatific story with evil and its triumphs left out of the picture.¹ The evidence of the Fore-Scene itself points to Hardy's total attitude, of which he himself may not have been aware at the time and which he certainly often misinterpreted according to his prevailing mood in the last years of his life. The final note of the Fore-Scene is indeed more human than it may seem at once.

As pure Intelligence we can never 'learn' what the process is, but 'muse on'—this is an answer to the attempt made by science, by abstract thought itself, to comprehend the whole of reality and also an assertion of Reason's right to act as a true standard of values in its own sphere. But even Reason has had to admit that 'already change [has] played strange pranks'; and then there is the dawning of tender compassions which throw their light and colour and fill with meaning the whole scene of civilization. Against this background the modern chaos of civilization can perhaps be better understood. The feeling of frustration which we find expressed in modern poetry with regard to trust in Nature as such, and also the dim recognition of some integral growth in humanity gain in significance if *The Dynasts* is judged by contemporary standard.² After having given us this composite perspective, so to say, Hardy unrolls before us the drama of modern civilization on trial.

¹ Hardy refused to be called an 'atheist' (cf. Letter to Courtney in *Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, pp. 175-6).

Phrases and ideas torn out of the context of his imaginative works had often led to a misinterpretation of Hardy's own attitude. One of the poems considered to be typical of his philosophy, called *Nature's Questioning*, and frequently quoted against him, had been referred to by Mr. Noyes. 'Such ideas', writes Hardy (as of *Some Vast Imbecility*), 'are merely enumerated in the poem as fanciful alternatives to several others, having nothing to do with my own opinion' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 218).

² Unlike the modernist poet, Hardy, though his eyes were clearly open to evils and imperfection in Nature, never advocated the cult of ugliness; that is to say, he never identified art with horror and ugliness as such—even in the defects of Nature he saw, as an artist, potentialities for goodness and beauty. In his diary (1877) he says:

'I think the art lies in making these defects [in Nature and life] the basis of a hitherto unperceived beauty, by irradiating them with "the light that never was" on their surface, but is seen to be latent in them by the spiritual eye.' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. i, p. 151.)

CHAPTER II

THE DYNASTS (cont.)

EARLY in the drama occurs a significant episode in which religion, which has lost its true character and inspiration, is shown in the background of a general decay of civilization. The wars have not yet begun, but the preparations already receive in the Cathedral of Milan the blessings of authority.¹ The Empress Josephine enters, followed by the Emperor with his retinue; the Cardinal Archbishop Caprara and the clergy conduct the ceremony with due rituals, burning incense, while music fills the air. To prevent any possible misunderstanding that Hardy intends to preach against religion the Spirit of the Pities itself is made to ask in wonder:

What is the creed that these rich rites disclose?

The Spirit of the Years, in recording external facts, answers that 'Christianity' is 'a local thing', 'which the wild dramas of this wheeling sphere include'. It does not speak of any change or variation that institutional Christianity, or Christianity as practised by many, may have undergone, but points out what regions are outside its sphere of operation:

Beyond whose span, uninfluenced, unconcerned,
The systems of the Suns go sweeping on
With all their many-mortaled planet train
In mathematical roll unceasingly.

Pity, however, is astonished. 'I did not recognize it here, forsooth', it confesses, 'though in its [i.e. Christianity's] early, loving kindly days of gracious purpose', Pity knew it well.

The usual misuse of institutional religion during the passions of war is sharply noted, and it is seen how in Italy a blind despotic ruler like Napoleon can contrive to combine his own

¹ Part I, Act I, Scene 6.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

designs with a show of religion. The leaders of the Church surrender to him and bless him before his blind exploits begin.¹

Thus are the self-styled servants of the Highest
Constrained by earthly duress to embrace
Mighty imperiousness as it were choice
And hand the Italian sceptre unto one²

—says Pity. It is pointed out that this leader of the people, 'who, with a saturnine, sour-humoured grin', at first gained power by pretending to fight against the old tyranny of Imperialism,

Professed at first to flout antiquity,
Scorn limp conventions, smile at mouldy thrones,
And level dynasts down to journeymen!

but very soon revealed his true character. This arch-enemy of democracy, of freedom,

Now labours to achieve
The thing it overthrew.

¹ Compare the scene in Part III: there Napoleon, at a later stage, is shown as having shed some of his hypocrisy, and developed critical powers along with unashamed pugnacity. He is in a curious way made to appear as a cynical defender of Christianity; revealing what Hardy deeply believed to be the Christian concept of pacificism, as opposed to the whole business of war. Napoleon's disastrous expedition to Moscow sets the scene. Before his ruthless conflict with the Russian soldiers, he is busy getting his military machine ready in his own efficient manner. The Russian priests on the other side pass through the defending regiments, 'bearing the icon and other religious insignia', offering scriptural benediction and courage. This raises Napoleon's ire; to him this is illogical: war is war, religion is religion; his militarism is frank and pagan. He bursts out:

Ay! Not content to stand on their own strength,
They try to hire the enginry of Heaven.
I am no theologian, but I laugh
That men can be so grossly logicless,
When war, defensive or aggressive either,
Is in its essence Pagan, and opposed
To the whole gist of Christianity!

(Part III, Act I, Scene 4.)

This is psychologically sound, and throws the military mind in fine relief; trust in efficient army and armaments needs no help from heaven. This strange mouth-piece is employed, indirectly, to vindicate the position of a truly religious man.

Napoleon's companion Bessières politely answers, in the same vein:

'Tis to fanaticize their courage, Sire.

² Part I, Act I, Scene 6.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

This is an admirable picture of the making of a dictator and holds true of the ways of tyranny all the world over. The Spirit of Earth here makes a sharp criticism of the credulous, inconsistent behaviour of men who allow themselves to be hoodwinked by dictators and by the false priests who bless the latter. 'They feel'—the human beings—and yet they remain powerless and inactive, their 'puppetry' remains; that Nature allows this curious 'dualism' is an owned flaw in her consistency'. By Nature, the Spirit of the Earth means that symbol of forces

Men love to dub Dame Nature—that lay-shape
They use to hang phenomena upon.

The Spirit Sinister takes advantage of the situation and curiously blames the Spirit of Reason itself for an attitude which, according to it, is a defensive one. If the Spirit of the Years, it says, by any chance tries to show some 'right or reason' in the Process of Existence, that will not be proved till Doomsday.¹ This provokes the Spirit of the Years to anger and label the Spirit Sinister as the 'Iago of the Incorporeal World'.

This whole scene lights up in a subtle way the inter-play of two different principles operative in creation, the Human Will, that which distinguishes humanity, and the Nature-'Will' to which man submits. There is pathos and also an element of comedy in such submission; in the very fact of trying to justify himself—as Napoleon does so often in *The Dynasts*—man is showing that he could have acted otherwise and somehow making his sorrow unreal.

Nelson's death² is a great moment in history, and here the tragedy is depicted in its full human majesty. To what is this tragedy attributed? This time, more definitely, to the faulty

¹ Part I, Act I, Scene 6, p. 34.

² Part I, Act v, Scene 4. Nelson's essential nobility is stressed throughout; his attitude towards war, even though he was taking a prominent part in it, preserved a sensitive detachment and warm humanity which would be unthinkable in a tyrant

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

machinery of civilization. Pity cries out that if 'necessitation sways' the human shapes in whom some power, some Mode, quickens sense, then that Mode is not purposeless but indeed cruel and therefore purposive. It refers to Sophocles,

A life there was
Among these self-same frail ones . . .
Who visioned it too clearly,

and the Pities go on to quote Sophocles:

Such gross injustice to their own creation
Burdens the time with mournfulness for us,
And for themselves with shame!

If it were a Neutral Will, a mechanism 'beyond good and evil', then there would be no question of any pain or frustration, for the mere operation of law apart from human elements involves no principle of values.

Things mechanized
By coils and pivots set to fore-framed codes
Would, in a thorough-sphered melodic rule,
And governance of sweet consistency,
Be cessed no pain, whose burnings would abide
With That Which holds responsibility,
Or inexist. . . .

But the machinery is partly human, and to that extent purposive; because consciousness is not yet dominant, it hurts, becomes evil, there is not even the 'sweet consistency' of mere

or dictator in war. When he hears that the man whose bullet mortally wounded him has been successfully killed in reprisal, he bursts out:

'Twas not worth while!—He was, no doubt, a man
Who in simplicity and sheer good faith
Strove but to serve his country. Rest be to him!
And may his wife, his friends, his little ones,
If such he had, be tided through their loss,
And soothed amid the sorrow brought by me.

(Part I, Act v, Scene 4, p. 95.)

The unsparing honesty of these words uttered by a dying hero reveals in a flash the terrible futility of war: war which by its very nature must violate and blindly destroy, and can never serve the true impulses of humanity.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

machinery in motion. The false working of such a neutral machinery might conceivably hurt some unknown constructor but it would involve no feeling on our part.

Abstract Reason, the Spirit of the Years, cannot of course answer this question, it merely pleads for suspension of judgement and explains that the Prime Cause is 'prócessive, Rapt' and yet 'superconscious'.¹ 'The cognizance ye mourn . . .', it says—the cognizance which, so far as the Intelligence is justified to report, is merely an emergence, and in fact, as the Pities say bitterly,

And hence unneeded
In the economy of Vitality.

But in the economy of Vitality it is there, this awareness and all its problems. But then Time has not said the last word, this new factor may yet be revealed better. The Spirit of the Years, who always opposes any assumption of purposiveness, remarks,

O heap not blame on that in-brooding Will;
O pause, till all things all their days fulfill!

This recognition, however indirect, of the *possibility* of some development, of 'fulfilment', shows a certain modification in the attitude of Reason and is not without significance.²

¹ Part I, Act v, Scene 4. It is interesting to note that in the editions including the one-volume 1910 edition the words used are:

Purposive
Yet superconscious.

In the 1923 edition of *The Dynasts* (and in the two-volume pocket edition of 1924) we have:

prócessive
Yet superconscious.

In the edition of 1926 the lines are given in their modern form (see also footnote to p. 47). The idea of 'process' was evidently more satisfying to him than a general belief in 'purpose'.

² Not that, in spite of its neutrality, the Spirit of the Years really can avoid recognizing also the difference of 'good' and 'evil'—time and again Reason makes ethical judgements, and comments on the trend of present events and the possible developments in the future. The attitude of Reason to the death of Pitt, or of Nelson, for instance, as contrasted with its attitude to the sufferings or defeat of Napoleon, would show this. Reason's attitude towards war is unmistakable—disasters involving

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

This point is emphasized as the drama of *The Dynasts* rolls on. The problems of consciousness, of its place in the human process, in the human civilization, will be revealed in stages. In Act VI, Scene 3, on the day that it seems inevitable that 'Austria smoke with slaughter', we are shown the picture of the mounting climax of war:

'Soon the two divisions under Soult are seen ascending in close column the inclines of the Pratzen Height. Thereupon the heads of the Russian centre columns disclose themselves, breaking the skyline of the summit from the other side. . . . A fierce struggle develops there between Soult's division and these. . . .'

The Pities cannot stand any more: their Chorus invokes,
O Great Necessitator, heed us now!

If there is to be this suffering, if indeed it must be that this day 'Austria smoke with slaughter', then at least

Quicken the issue as Thou knowest how;
And dull to suffering those whom it befalls
To quit their lodgment in a flesh that galls!

This is the heart's human cry in suffering, the desire somehow suddenly to stop or hasten a process which is already there, and ask for some drastic intervention which will violate Law and Nature and suddenly satisfy humanity.

Hardy's drama does not go farther into the matter, but if we look into modern poetry we shall find that the problem of 'intervention' is followed up; there is no appeal, or hardly any, that the process of events which results in human suffering should stop or be modified; the modern poet would insist on interposing human planning on the process; he would, as it were, check one process by another, or rather establish a new

such sorrow and death it refers to as 'an *evil* harlequinade' (Part I, Act VI, Scene 8, p. 136). The Spirit Sinister bitterly jests about Reason's reaction to Pitt's death, and says:

Even Its official Spirit can show ruth
At man's fag end, when his destruction's sure!

(p. 137.)

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

relationship between Nature's process and the human process. Courage, according to the modern poets of the 'process', can come from the only source that is open—knowledge of Law, careful understanding of the workings of Nature, human mind and body, and of the interdependence of forces. The Spirit of the Years says:

Then note anew
(Since ye forget) the ordered potencies,
Nerves, sinews, trajects, eddies, ducts of It,
The Eternal Urger, pressing change on change.

Again Nature and humanity are symbolized in one composite figure, as a sort of immense organism which holds the entire creation together and moves not with a discernible purpose but out of an inexorable necessity of change. If we are allowed to develop the modern argument in this connexion we can say that the workings of '*the Eternal Urger*' are not to be checked by some act of 'miracle', by some act of direct intervention, so that guns would stop, death and disaster be averted, and also, as the human heart often wishes, there even be a retrospective undoing of events which have already happened. Nature will go on 'pressing change on change', say the Years, and the reaction of the human heart to this is that Nature itself will not necessarily improve, but that human consciousness may well take up the implied challenge of Nature. But, as the futility of the Pities in not yet being able to intervene proves, emotional reactions in themselves, valuable though they are as indications of a new growth in the scheme of evolution, are not enough; the conditions of humanity will not advance till our emotions, not content merely with appeals of prayer or suffering, begin also to try to put prayers into concrete form, into preventive, remedial, and creative actions. Hardy's drama, in the conflict of ideas represented by the Pities, suggests a certain new attitude towards the human process which illustrates his belief in 'amelioration'. And yet this passage does not assert any faith at all in the melioristic principle, it shows

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

the whole process as one and interconnected; the principle of unceasing change and movement in Nature is recorded.

It is perhaps not unhelpful to examine how this idea has led up to the modernist preoccupation with the process.

After this expostulation of the Pities and the answer of the Spirit of the Years follows a penetrating analysis of the true spirit of irony. It is the function of irony, which is a human attribute particularly developed in our stage of civilization, not to allow itself to be influenced by only one emotional interpretation of events, but to be aware at the same time of different points of view and of different logical deductions from varied events. True irony lies not in a facile denial or ridicule of some aspect of truth but, on the contrary, in its power of evoking in us the claims of separate points of view which can be fully reconciled only if the basis of events can itself be changed. It is natural and human for us to suffer 'when a Europe bleeds', but this kind of suffering or such an event has not happened for the first time, nor are such disasters confined only to human beings. The Poet unrolls a wider panorama of Creation; in the midst 'of national disasters in long train'¹ he makes the Spirit of Irony speak thus to the Spirits of human compassion:²

O Innocents, can ye forget
That things to be were shaped and set
Ere mortals and this planet met? . . .

Ere ye, young Pities, had upgrown
From out the deeps where mortals moan
Against a ruling not their own,

He of the Years beheld, and we,
Creation's prentice artistry
Express in forms that now unbe

Tentative dreams from day to day;
Mangle its types, re-knead the clay
In some more palpitating way; . . .

¹ Part I, Act VI, Scene 8.

² Part I, Act VI, Scene 3.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

It is good to be told when human suffering seems overwhelming that the workings of Creation are inscrutable beyond our limited range of understanding.¹ Modern physics has, since the War, served this particular function through numerous books written by specialists for the general public. The avidity with which books on astronomy and on the different abstract sciences have been read by an astonishingly large number of readers is perhaps due to the need that modern people, faced by an enormity of circumstance, have felt to extend their consciousness, over and beyond the confines of a tormented human existence. Hardy, with singular prescience and psychological grasp, brings us the same message with concentrated poetic power.²

Other problems connected with war and peace, the futility of meeting violence by violence, the herd instinct which can so easily adapt itself to mass hysteria and release uncontrolled human forces for destruction, are depicted as the story moves through the second part of *The Dynasts*. In Act I, Scene I, we have a curious episode in which Gevriilière approaches Fox to discuss

Means to mitigate and even end
These welfare-wasting wars; Ay, usher in
A painless spell of peace,

but his particular remedy to bring about this desired object, by assassinating 'the One, a single man' who was responsible for all this 'fevered disquietude and forceful death'—as if an additional act of murder would subtract from rather than augment evil—does not impress Fox. Fox understands the whole

¹ As the Spirit of the Years says a little later (Act VI, Scene 8, p. 137):

Our readings Why and Whence,
Are but the flower of Man's intelligence.

Hardy does not hint at any philosophy of the Cosmos, but he does not let us, in this drama, forget the immensity of the background, and he does suggest that the human events are not isolated from the immensities of Nature.

² In his novel *Two on a Tower* Hardy used the astronomical background with singular effect.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

psychology of such desperation which has played havoc in history under the guise of doctrines of vindication, necessary evil, thesis and antithesis, &c. While detaining the man under guard he comments on the

Wry and stealthy means
That haunt sad brains which brood on despotism,
But lack the tools to justly cope therewith.

This idea that evil cannot be met with evil, however, has not gained sufficient strength and therefore it is easy for despotic persons like Napoleon to thwart the innate and elemental urge of creation which brings to more 'flowering' the human 'intelligence'.

The problem of evil remains as it is, because the insensate lust for power which is a concession of the evolving human will to the blind will of Nature, and also the partially awakened responsibility in men which tries to remedy wrong by wrongful methods, both continue to operate. Therefore, even when there is a chance of preventing a war by making a compromise with Russia, 'fortunately for the manufacture of corpses by machinery, Napoléon sticks to this veto [i.e. not to make peace with Russia] and so wards off the awkward catastrophe of a general peace descending on Europe'.¹

The Spirit Sinister here puts its finger in the right place by blaming the *machinery* of civilization, not the peoples who are dragooned into serving it, for the awful consequences. While organization itself is an achievement of humanity, mere organization uninformed by constant sense of the objective can easily become, as the Spirit of the Years points out, 'The enginry of Force'.² And so long as this 'enginry' is in the hands of tyrants, as the Pitiees say, there is not much 'hope for Europe's reason-wrought repose'.

This idea is developed further in the next scene. Here we find an important advance, or perhaps a temporary admission

¹ Part II, Act I, Scene 2, p. 150, Spirit Sinister.

² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

of other values, in the attitude of the Spirit of the Years. The psychosis of war-contagion, the febrile excitement of the crowd in times of social dislocation, is well known and we are all prone to be affected by it. Only very recently psychologists have shown how this phenomenon is completely opposed to the operation of the collective will; Hardy in this drama already indicated, in a singularly modern manner of analysis, how such a surrender of individual responsibility simply means the lapsing of the human will into the non-sentient will of Nature. In such a phenomenon what we see is merely the operation of Nature's forces in the shape of human passions. It is the antithesis of the collective *human* will, the true Will. As Reason says:

So doth the Will objectify Itself
In likeness of a sturdy people's wrath.¹

The Spirit of the Years goes farther and states that this wrath of the people is something

which takes no count of the new trends of time²

—a tardy recognition of some new factors which have begun to operate in history. This new factor is again and again broken in upon by the old blind forces:

Uncertainly, by fits, the Will doth work . . .

To foil the modern methods counterposed!³

These 'modern methods' are fashioned by a new order of Will, of humanity, and, as this drama reveals, humanity struggles to make them operative. Success does not come at all within the range of this drama, but impartial reason is compelled to note the particular character that the human struggle in history has assumed. Repeatedly the question comes up to our mind as to whether Nature itself, in order to preserve its order, to save the stars from wrong and to keep the molecules in mathematics, is not constantly trying to overcome the dis-

¹ Part II, Act I, Scene 3, p. 155.

² Ibid., p. 156.

³ Ibid., p. 156.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

harmonies which unexplainably seem to crop up frequently. Given the situation of the Napoleonic War, it is claimed that the English Fleet becomes a symbol of corrective force. In the quaint words of the Ironic Spirits:

But the weaving Will from eternity,
(Hemming them in by a circling sea,)
Evolved the fleet of the Englishry.¹

'Them' here means the people living in England ('the land of Ships' as the Years put it later on), who, by some chain of logical circumstance, are put in a particular situation which seems inevitably to produce protective grey walls in the ocean to safeguard civilization from disaster.²

Wars, Wars, Wars. The interminable Napoleonic fratricide goes on, the blind Will has humanity in its grip. The battle of Jena; in the field of Eylau lie the thousands of 'dead, strewing the early-nighted plains'.³ Evidently Napoleon cannot stop; but is he himself self-assured and undivided in his mind?

Hardy brings a poignant note in the scene where Queen Louisa of Prussia first meets Napoleon. Magdeburg has been lost, Prussia is being bled by Napoleon's army. Alexander and Talleyrand had spoken to Napoleon, the Queen herself had made desperate request to him beseeching for the return of Magdeburg. Napoleon had politely refused. Suddenly the atmosphere of state-craft and diplomacy is shattered by a woman's tears. As if surprised, Napoleon asks her 'Why is this?' Dropping her imperial cloaks she at once answers:

Between us two, as man and woman now,
Is't even possible you question why!⁴

¹ Part II, Act I, Scene 6, p. 165.

² Napoleon was evidently, according to the Ironic Spirits, a malevolent force, and yet, as they say,

Deeming himself omnipotent
With the Kings of the Christian continent,
To warden the waves was his further bent.

The 'weaving Will from eternity' frustrated his attempt.

³ Part II, Act I, Scene 7, p. 167.

⁴ Part II, Act I, Scene 8, p. 178.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

Napoleon was not quite prepared for this; his false Will-armoury fails to protect him for an instant and he clearly confesses:

Some force within me, baffling mine intent
Harries me onward, whether I will or no.
My star, my star, is what's to blame—not I.¹

So Napoleon too has another 'Will', and an 'intent' which he pitifully fails to carry out.

But it is easy for him to shift the whole responsibility on to 'some force', to Nature, which, as Irony has already pointed out, is that

lay-shape
Men use to hang phenomena upon

—Nature, which has already storms and floods and famine, cruel exploitation and war to its credit. This ever-present unchanging force of Nature, often symbolized by man as some watchful, pitiless, unknown power of Fate above, provokes even the cold-hearted Napoleon to use almost the words of Lear,²

My star, my star is what's to blame—not I.³

Napoleon in Hardy's chronicle recovers soon enough, and we are shown a full measure of his vulgarity as he indulges in it immediately afterwards in his talk with his minister Talleyrand. But, as we shall note, this interplay and conflict of wills in Napoleon's character is further shown in significant variations, reaching its climax in a monologue of self-revelation at the very end.

¹ Part II, Act I, Scene 8, p. 179.

² It is the stars, the stars above us . . .

(*King Lear*, Act IV, Scene 3.)

Othello would not blame the 'chaste stars' but refers to the 'cause':

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul . . .

(*Othello*, Act V, Scene 2.)

³ Part II, Act I, Scene 8, p. 179.

CHAPTER III

THE DYNASTS (cont.)

THE 'War's red retinue'¹ marches on; Neutral Will operates on its mechanism:

So the Will heaves through Space, and moulds the times,
With mortals for Its fingers! We shall see
Again men's passions, virtues, visions, crimes,
Obey resistlessly
The mutative, unmotived, dominant Thing
Which sways in brooding dark their wayfaring!²

Poignant scenes of war are portrayed in a variety of detail; scenes which are all too evocative of the accounts of the Great War that we have read in recent years. Human passions are shown in their brutality; Napoleon's cold ruthlessness in parting with Josephine is woven into a general pattern of horror and callousness.³ His semi-pious protestations about the inexorable necessities of Nature⁴ sound like the blatant words of the tyrant determined to work out his designs. The ostensible reason given for his decision to re-marry is shown to be devoid

¹ Semi-Chorus II, Rumours (Part II, Act II, Scene 5). In all editions up to the one of 1926 the word 'purposive' instead of 'mutative' is used; the change apparently came as an afterthought, and is in every way an improvement: 'purposive' and 'unmotived' going together rather darkened the meaning; the idea of mutation, moreover, is in line with his main philosophy. (See footnote 1 of p. 38.)

² The Spirit of the Years, Part II, Act II, Scene 3.

³ Not only does Napoleon rudely repulse Josephine but he goes on to say:

And this much likewise you must promise me;
To act in the formalities thereof
As if you shaped them of your own free will.

To which Josephine answers:

How can I—when no free will's left in me?

Napoleon thunders back:

You are a willing party—do you hear?

(Part II, Act v, Scene 2, pp. 261-2.)

⁴ 'O come, now, . . . Nature's a dial, whose shade no hand puts back . . .' (Part II, Act II, Scene 6).

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

even of any human instinct for perpetuating a family tradition; it is depicted as a mere act of cowardly conscience, of defensive action projected into the future. Conscious that his own wrongs will one day expose him, he is thinking in terms of posthumous self-justification.¹

So; I must send down shoots to future time
Who'll plant my standard and my story there.

Side by side with this brutality and Josephine's unavailing sorrow we are given a series of pictures of common sufferers in the village, citizens, householders, who, like the fallen Queen, are helpless victims of unmerciful events. The cry of one of the citizens rings and reverberates through the poignant scene:²

Author of all our ills . . .
Our harvest fields and fruits he tramples on
Accumulating ruin in our land . . .

Time never can efface the glint of tears
In palaces, in shops, in fields, in cots,
From women widowed, son-less, fatherless . . .³

There are incidents, too, of those strange moving acts of friendship between helpless men made 'enemies' by the strange wickedness of rulers and false leaders of men. Pity says:⁴

What do I see but thirsty, throbbing bands
From these inimic hosts defiling down
In homely need towards the little stream
That parts their enmities, and drinking there!
They get to grasping hands across the rill,
Sealing their sameness as earth's sojourners.—
What more could plead the wryness of the times
Than such unstudied piteous pantomimes!

The Spirit Ironical dwells on it to drive the point home, and says of the Will, 'The spectacle of Its instruments, set to riddle

¹ Part II, Act v, Scene 1, p. 254.

² This is closely parallel to the chorus in T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, where the Chorus of Women tell of the havocs of war.

³ p. 227.

⁴ Part II, Act iv, Scene 5.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

one another through, and then to drink together in peace and concord, is where the humour comes in, and makes the play worth seeing!' Such incidents are too vitally near us to need any comment.¹

The ghastly battle of Albuera takes place; the distraught King is told of this 'victory'; it mixes the nightmare of reality with the nightmare of his failing sanity. Pity expresses again its inability to interpret such reckless persistence of destructive forces as the action of a merely neutral 'unmaliced, unimpassioned, nescient Will' (Act VI, Scene 5). Albuera marks another stage in Hardy's drama, when out of the depths of anguish breaks a clearer rush of faith from the torn heart of Pity. Pity prays; it does not know why; it yields to faith.²

Something within me aches to pray
To some Great Heart, to take away
This evil day, this evil day!

The usual background of sharp contrast is provided by the passionate scepticism of the Chorus Ironic, which remarks:

. . . Thou'lt pray to It:—
But where do Its compassions sit?
Yea, where abides the heart of It?

How can there be in the vast moving cauldron of matter any room for such a thing as a 'heart'? So the Chorus Ironic continues:

Is it where sky-fires flame and flit,
Or solar creatures spew and spit,
Or ultra-stellar night-webs knit?

¹ A recent example in literature of such a tragic and curiously pathetic spectacle is provided in Mr. Wells's *The Shape of Things* (scenario version), in which an airman, accidentally brought down to earth after having dropped horrible bombs, parts with his gas-mask to save a little girl who was about to be choked to death by the deadly yellow gas which he himself had just been spreading in Everytown. As his own death approaches, the terrible comedy of his dual action makes him burst out into hysterical laughter such as that of the Spirit Ironic.

It is curious to find how, a long time before the World War, Hardy was depicting scenes which could have occurred in one of the latest narratives of war tragedy in modern Europe.

² Part II, Act VI, Scene 5.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

What is Its shape? Man's counterfeit?
That turns in some far sphere unlit
The Wheel which drives the Infinite?

But the Pities are strengthened by the very anguish of overwhelming circumstances, by the multiplying havoc of wars; their faith is not lost but redeemed and purified, their foundations made more steadfast and secure. It is significant that instead of the elements of tenderness and faith losing their hold on life at the inexorable impact of one grim tragedy succeeding another, the raging storms make the tiny flickering flame shine with unwavering intensity as the story develops.

. . . Mock on! Yet I'll go pray
To some *Great Heart* . . .¹

cries the warm human core of Compassion, and there is no answer that Reason or Irony or Sinister Disbelief can give to such a quest; but there is also nothing to prove that Pity's prayer will be efficacious.

Human faith, of course, cannot maintain itself on the same consistent level, and we shall see repeated lapses into misery, but in this drama Hardy makes it come back and each time attain a yet higher triumph than before. The Pities often fail, and nowhere in the drama have they been given any chance to prove the material basis of their belief—Reason and the Ironic Spirits have as much right to hold to their opinions so far as the facts and circumstances are concerned—and yet all the other Spirits have to admit from time to time that the Pities proceed on different lines of valuation, that they are not defeated by the impact of events, because they continue till the last—as a matter of fact, increasingly so—to apply an inner criterion of feeling and growth of awareness which are obviously beyond the scope of logic.

Albuera is over, but the Nemesis is not over; it has to work itself out through time and dire circumstance. We shall now

¹ Part II, Act vi, Scene 5, p. 306.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

be given an uncomfortable realistic picture of so-called 'peace'; that is to say, diplomatic peace, which often is a worse form of fanning war passions into flame. Even the raw experience of a recent war fails to stop those political operations which themselves make war inevitable. Prime Minister Percival, in the interior of Carlton House conferring with the Under-Secretary, gives strange hints of an impending evil, which makes the Under-Secretary say:

Your speech is dark . . .

Percival answers:¹

Well, a new war in Europe.
Before the year is out there may arise
A red campaign outscaling any seen.
Russia and France the parties to the strife—
Ay, to the death!

Grimly confirms the chronicle the Spirit of the Years, addressing Percival:²

Yes, sir; your text is true

—making Percival shrink and creating a weird uncanny effect in the room where the politicians sit.

Napoleon, the symbol of the destructive energy in men, will leave no measure untried that leads to the uttermost working-out of the tragic show. This must happen, no power on earth can check this march of events while humanity has not learnt its lessons. Not that humanity has not had its chances of understanding; here Hardy makes the Spirit of the Years speak of the Past 'traced thick with teachings glimpsed unheedingly'.² So long as history does not teach us, nothing can. The human Will must have the freedom to do wrong as well as right, so that out of its own volition it can shape and modulate Nature's forces and raise the structure of civilization. 'Teachings glimpsed unheedingly' have to be learnt by disaster after disaster till they have gone home. This is an inference that

¹ Part II, Act vi, Scene 7, p. 319.

² *Ibid.*, p. 320.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

the modern mind may draw from *The Dynasts*; in such indications as these, not supported by the different actors in the drama nor fully worked out anywhere in a logical form, Hardy is curiously near to the latest form of 'rationalism', or 'realism', that we find advocated in modern literature.

Groups of politicians go on plotting, governments move along crooked old grooves of diplomacy, irrespective of human consequences, not caring for individual suffering, so long as greedy militarism is appeased.

The rawest Dynast of the group concerned
Will, for the good or ill of mute mankind,
Down-topple to the dust like soldier Saul,
And Europe's mouldy-minded oligarchs
Be propped anew; while garments roll in blood
To confused noise, with burning, and fuel of fire.
Nations shall lose their noblest in the strife,
And tremble at the tidings of an hour!¹

The anger and bitterness with which the neutral Spirit of Reason speaks of war and of all forms of evil, whether in thought or in action, should be weighed against its profession of fatalistic philosophy. Coming from the Years, this denunciation of violence has a curiously moving effect. At the same time this attitude should not be stretched to mean more than a noble and sensitive humanitarianism such as we find in the writings of many of the most distinguished of modern intellectual 'agnostics'. This Spirit of the Years analyses the situation in modern history in those reticent lines above; no more hint is needed, no other solution can be expected from Reason. The tone of the speech is obvious, optimistic, or pessimistic as one may choose to call it; it does not matter. This is where we stand even now in our own times and in these days of loss of Will; the cold lucidity of Reason and the sarcasm which comes into its speech should act as a challenge to human nature. Hardy has put the whole problem before modern consciousness

¹ Spirit of the Years, Part II, Act vi, Scene 7.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

with vigour; we shall have further occasion to note how very near he is to the thought tendencies which dominate the poetry of to-day. The problem of the Prime Cause remains ever a mystery; the vast universe of Nature yet lies unrevealed to our comprehension. Science has but thrown here and there a searchlight into its far-flung depths; but human psychology is grappling with the task of the purposive Will of man. The modern mind yet feels frustrated by inner fissures of Will; doubt and dismay sweep through our consciousness; the external signs in modern poetry seem to be depressing. But the motive forces of our age, as revealed in the turbulent poetry of our times, is, as we shall try to show, very definitely an attempt of the human Will to integrate.

Before we pass on to the third section of *The Dynasts* it would be well, perhaps, to pause and see how far we have travelled with Hardy in this stormy development of consciousness. The drama of the human mind thickens, even as the story itself gathers in the variety and vividness of a vast consummation.

On the eve of a darkening horizon, before a thunderstorm, we are bid to¹

Look all around
Where Europe spreads her crinkled ground,
From Osmanlee to Hekla's Mound, . . .

Hark at the cloud-combed Ural pines;
See how each, wailful-wise, inclines;
Mark the mist's labyrinthine lines;

Behold the tumbling Biscay Bay;
The Midland main in silent sway;
As urged to move them, so move they.

No less through regal puppet-shows
The rapt Determinator throes
That neither good nor evil knows!

¹ Idem, Part II, Act vi, Scene 7, p. 322.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

The Spirit of the Years upholds the attitude of a vast neutrality; it has dropped its note of passion and bitterness, which sometimes alternates with its mood of unaffected, 'beyond good and evil' philosophy of Time and the Recording Angels. 'As urged to move them, so move they', pine-trees and clouds, waves and winds and human puppet-shows follow the motions of primeval Nature. The part that the new factor of human consciousness can play is not mentioned; that 'feelings' or the Pities can be 'engaged' in the spectacle we are not told.

But, apart from human intention, Nature 'Itself', we cannot cease hoping, perhaps foolishly, will somehow come closer to our aid. So the Pities still hope that

Yet It may wake and understand
Ere Earth unshape,¹

and they also hope that after it has become awake it will 'with knowledge use a painless hand'. If knowledge indeed has to operate, let it be made to work less painfully—this is a cry which, as we know, often comes from the heart of humanity.

The second book of *The Dynasts* ends on this note.

¹ Part II, Act VI, Scene 7, p. 322.

CHAPTER IV

THE DYNASTS (cont.)

IN the third section of *The Dynasts*, through an intricate network of historical events, we can trace a clear and swift development of the inner drama of Napoleon's mind and a further stage in the analysis of human consciousness. The two great battles described with relentless detail are those of Leipzig and Waterloo. Each great battle in Hardy's epic develops through a crescendo of emotional development; then comes the ominous calm, the dark foreboding of a calamity holding the horizon; then the storm of war swift and strong; then death, disaster, conflicts in the minds of the fighters and the common folk; then calm again till another crash. Thus the series have to go on till they are completed.

As the wars have proceeded, the mass-manceuvres have gained in efficiency and magnitude; the Unconscious has gained domination over larger crowds of men made blind by the passions of war. This fact is stressed in a fitting prelude to the battle of Leipzig in the words of the Spirit of the Years (Act I, Scene 5). It describes how the armies—'The mindless minions of the spell'—are in 'the grip of' mechanized enchantment.¹ This feature of herd-driven mechanization in modern international warfare, which makes war if possible more non-human,

¹ Compare Pity's poignant remarks before the battle of Albuera:

... On earth below
Are men—unnatured and mechanic—drawn—
Mixt nationalities in row and row,
Wheeling them to and fro ...

(Act VI, Scene 4, p. 299.)

Also:

Thus doth the Great Foresightless mechanize
In blank entrancement ...

(After-Scene, p. 521.)

The Primal Unconscious gains mastery of the human conscious when masses of men are driven by collective passion.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

is at once an example of civilization's power to unite its resources and its failure to control them. The herd mentality of primitive men, which was easily swayed by anti-social passions, finds, in the abuses of modern national and international capacity to organize, a chance of wreaking havoc on a large scale. Mere will to power, divorced from moral ends, shows itself to be a form of Hardy's Unconscious Will:¹

A Will that wills above the will of each,
Yet but the will of all conjunctively;
A fabric of excitement, web of rage,
That permeates as one stuff the weltering whole.

This is a kind of neutral, Natural Will-force, which paralyses instead of vitalizing the conscious, individual, controlling sense of truth and lies at the root of our human self, to be stirred into a blind fury; whether it can be controlled and used for a fuller existence by the dawning powers of human consciousness is the problem that faces us. All that is said here in *The Dynasts* is that the effects of yielding to the blind Will of Nature are sometimes apparent even to a Napoleon: as the Pities say, in connexion with the remarks of the Years,

The ugly horror grossly regnant here
Wakes even the drowsed half-drunken Dictator
To all its vain uncouthness!

That strange battle of Leipzig²—in which 'Nationalities from the uttermost parts of Asia . . . meet those from the Atlantic edge of Europe for the first and last time. By noon the sound becomes a loud droning, uninterrupted and breve-like as from the pedal of an organ kept continuously down. . . .'³ Victory and loss; from one side's point of view victory, from another's a loss, but it little matters either way.

¹ Spirit of the Years, Part III, Act I, Scene 5.

² Part II, Act II, Scene 2, p. 383. Hardy mentions how singularly inadequate are the historical records about this battle (cf. *Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii).

³ Part III, Act III, Scene 5.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

The Battle of the Nations now is closing,
And all is lost to One, to many gained;

so says the Chorus of Ironic Spirits, and shows the futility of
a war of the dynasts—

The old dynastic routine re-imposing,
The new dynastic structure unsustained. . . .

Here, perhaps, a clue is given to this drama: the armies of the dynasts clash against each other in a mere blind fury of natural forces; the issue of such wars must always be left undecided, for there is neither purpose nor reason behind such fratricidal fanaticism. Uncontrolled inconscient forces rule such a system of mere action and interaction; the system of values, of feelings, of reason is not to be identified with it. The whole drama of *The Dynasts* depicts one order. It may continue no one knows how long; Hardy has given a part of the story; a subsequent part has since then been played in the greatest war in modern history; there threatens in Europe, we are told, another display of the same 'old dynastic routine'. The Spirit of the Years will chronicle in due time what the future yet hides from us. But Hardy has also shown us unmistakably at least that neither the Spirit of Reason nor the Ironic Spirits—not to speak of the Pities—are satisfied with this war of dynasts, which is virtually a war of elemental Nature: they can see in such struggles, perhaps, something of an emergent principle of justice. Nelson, for instance, is not ridiculed or castigated; apparently, under the circumstances, even though wars are futile and wrong, he represents a saner order of society which wants to save itself from the destructive orgies of a megalomaniac. And in *The Dynasts*, considered from this point of view, victory after all is not with the purely destructive activities of Napoleon, but with the other side. However, mankind as a whole is still in a sorry plight; the description of us modern men is best given in the words which the Spirit

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

of the Years uses to denounce Napoleon when another war draws nearer:¹

Herein behold
How heavily grinds the Will upon his brain,
His halting hand, and his unlighted eye.

The responsibility for the 'unlighted eye' and the 'halting hand' rests on each individual, and humanity's struggle towards freedom, in spite of its wrong leaders and tyrants, has not after all ended. Failure comes not only to the War-leaders but to their followers, and yet the story of life continues; as Pity points out:¹

Yet is it but Napoléon who has failed.
The pale pathetic peoples still plod on
Through hoodwinkings to light!

The denouement of the drama comes with the battle of Waterloo. This section can be read as a complete drama by itself. It is rich in pathos, swift in its march of events; brilliant dialogue and description alternate with exquisitely tender pictures of Nature and animal life. To take but one of the latter, describing the effect of war preparations on innocent creatures of the field and forest, birds, beasts, and insects:²

. . . swallows abandon the hamlet-roofs.

.
The moles' tunnelled chambers are crushed by wheels,
The lark's eggs scattered, their owners fled,

.
The snail draws in at the terrible tread,
But in vain . . .
Beaten about by the heel and toe
Are butterflies. . . .

It is as if a dragon were let loose, crushing and scattering Nature's innocence. It must be noted that the unmistakable effect of Hardy's severely beautiful record of such events is not

¹ Act IV, Scene 4, p. 414.

² Act VI, Scene 8, p. 483.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

to make us feel that we are watching natural forces at work but the very reverse. Though, in strict logic, within the problem of Will which Hardy sets himself to illustrate, it is not possible to speak of these terrible happenings as something 'unnatural', yet his poetic heart is indeed all the time telling us a somewhat different story. It is difficult to forget such lines as¹

Trodden and bruised to a miry tomb
Are ears that have greened but will never be gold
And flowers in the bud that will never bloom.

No propaganda against war could go farther in appealing to our deepest conscience to exert itself, so that wrong and ruin may not continue to devastate this fair earth.

Before the battle of Waterloo the Spirit of the Years thus prepares us:²

Be mute, and let spin on
This whirlwind of the Will!

And the whirlwind proceeds.

The latter part of this section deals, as we have mentioned, almost entirely with the inner and outer conflicts of its main actor. We may take the scene of Napoleon's nightmare in full daylight when he drowns in a 'momentary sleep' with the battle raging all around:³

A horrible dream has gripped me—horrible!
I saw before me Lannes . . .
'What—blood again?' he said to me. 'Still blood?'

An old comrade who has previously died in the course of the wars thus questions this man of destiny. The Spirit Sinister stands for complete negation of human values, and yet in denouncing this mortal god of war—Napoleon—it says:⁴

He tops all human greatness; in that he
To lesser grounds of greatness adds the prime,
Of being without a conscience.

¹ Ibid.

³ Act VII, Scene 6, p. 501.

² Act VII, Scene 4, p. 496.

⁴ Act VII, Scene 8, p. 511.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

It is a queer way of confirming the existence and desirability of conscience.

The indictment of Napoleon grows intense and universal. And with it a sharper challenge to those who make the existence of such tyranny possible and give it the power of destructive action. The Spirit of the Years bitterly comments:¹

Observe that all wide sight and self-command
Desert these throngs now driven to demonry
By the Immanent Unrecking. . . .

This reference to the absence of 'wide sight' and 'self-command' is brought home to the modern mind in a more subtle and psychological manner than a general appeal to goodness which earlier poets would have made. Hardy's method is also closely connected with the modern technique of 'objectivity'. The force of an argument is brought to bear upon the reader by its being brought from different directions, the poet himself refraining from making a direct statement. The whole drama of *The Dynasts* is built up by a sustained and complex orchestration of this method; the conflicts of human personality are developed by a masterly interplay of the Spirits. Thus we are led on.

After the battle of Waterloo there is a direct encounter between Napoleon and the Spirit of the Years, as he falls into a nap on his saddle in the battle-field strewn with corpses.²

. . . Thus, to this last,

The Will in thee has moved thee, Bonaparte. . . .

One thing to be noticed about even such a character as Napoleon's, apparently immune from spiritual motives, is that he does not justify his actions as being moral or *ethically* inevitable. All that he can say in his customary attitude of self-justification is that he has served irresistible powers. In his not infrequent moments of intellectual questioning, Napoleon, in Hardy's *The Dynasts*, can definitely understand, as we have seen, the

¹ Act VII, Scene 8, p. 517.

² Act VII, Scene 9.

difference between his 'baffled intent', that is to say some rudiment of conscience, and the principle of power which makes man allow his Will to be dehumanized into a ruthless machine. While not wanting to stress a point which may be open to serious controversy, one can perhaps see in this attitude of Napoleon proof of a general rise in the level of consciousness. Hamlet, who is as different in his spiritual sensitiveness from Napoleon as two human beings could be, was by the very nature of his personality opposed to violence and evil. But his aversion was directed to evil as an extraneous force, to deal at all with which made him a rebel against life. There was little attempt to understand the relationship between what we call evil and the spiritual life. Desperately he struggles against the necessity of leaving his own normal environment of higher life to participate in life's struggle, which, instead of making him use his best powers for achieving harmonious perfection, drags him into using violent and wrong methods in a direct contact with the vulgar and contrary world. If we take the extremely precarious step of trying to enunciate a common principle of general human levels of consciousness from these two literary types—for Napoleon in *The Dynasts* is for our purposes a literary creation—we think we can conjecturally state that a Hamlet, though a spiritual Prince, does not try so much to face the interrelation of natural and moral forces as to dwell on the narrower individual problem of having to sacrifice one's ideal life for the necessities of a mundane turmoil of evil. But a modern military tyrant, dominated by the power-complex and a kind of genius for making an ultimate standard of perfection out of one's megalomaniac ideas, yet shows an inescapable awareness of the tragic paradox which is involved when human consciousness is made to serve a Will-force which is evidently, both in its nature and its effects, against the character of humanity, a character which the Will-force has itself created—to what end? Hamlet, once he is in the fray, uses all the instruments of violence unquestioningly; his suffering

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

is due mainly to the fact that he has at all to enter the arena of affairs.¹

The Spirit of the Years grimly points out to what effect, inexorably, the 'Will' has moved Bonaparte:

... 'tis true, I have ever known
That such a Will I passively obeyed!

exclaims Napoleon.² Here definitely is, if not a sense of crime, yet at least a sense of values implied, by the admission of 'passiveness' on the part of the man to 'such a Will'.

Soon we come to scathing words of Irony, who is not taken in by the pose of self-righteousness or even a kind of martyrdom of impotency which Hardy's Napoleon can so readily assume:

Nothing care I for these high-doctrined dreams,
And shape the case in quite a common way,
So I would ask, Ajaccian Bonaparte,
*Has all this been worth while?*³

Irony is not by its nature cruel, enjoying the spectacle of human misery, but downright and sane to the core even though sardonic in its utterances.

'O hideous hour,' says Napoleon, 'why am I stung by spectral questionings?'—and he begins to question whether he could not have acted otherwise so as to have made things move differently in 'history's dusky lanes'. 'Is it too late?' he asks, and answers himself, 'Yes.' He wishes he were dead before being thus defeated and shamed, he even admits to having in a sort of way 'fondly felt' that it was really within his ambition

To shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche
In human fame,

but evidently such ambitions were confined to chance phraseology; he confesses his failure even to play a suitably tyrannical role.

¹ This point has been taken up again in Appendix II, 'Hardy and "War-Poetry"'.
² Act VII, Scene 9, p. 519.

³ Italics mine.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

Hardy, fortunately, had not to see the strange belated appearance of dictators, though he had to suffer the terrible shock of a World War when, after having written *The Dynasts*, he thought that he had chronicled a more or less antiquated order of things. He makes Napoleon give expression to an idea which we believe is intrinsically true of humanity to-day. In spite of the sporadic eruptions which prove that our conflicts in civilization have far from ended, it can be said that civilization has entered a stage when playing the part of a demi-god is already over.

I came too late in time [says Napoleon]
To assume the prophet or the demi-god,
A part past playing now.

'Prophet' in the Napoleonic sense here only means a Super-Dictator; it has, of course, no spiritual significance. We can hope that the days of Gengis Khan are fast ending, that the combination of economic, political, and other forces operating in an international sphere, and the pressure brought by the general conscience of the peoples will make the law-breaking Conqueror type as obsolete as the mastodon. The recrudescence of the ferocious tribal 'old man' shows, perhaps, the death-throes of a dying order. But such considerations, even if they may immediately occur to modern readers who know all too well how dictators are desperately playing for power, are not raised in *The Dynasts*.

The argument of some sort of inner conflict in Napoleon is clinched and riveted in this final historical scene of *The Dynasts*, and our attention is not allowed to wander away from it. The partial freedom to misuse our will-power, and the hard-won privilege that human consciousness seems to have wrenched from Nature, instead of being made to develop by an unabated attempt to master Nature's forces, lapses again and again into the neutral continuity of natural forces. There is no definite promise that such a tendency to 'relapse' can be prevented; and

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

yet we are but watching one stage of the 'process', and have no right to prejudge the issue: in any case, if this seemingly indeterminate method of Nature appears to us to be a challenge to our humanity, there is nothing to prevent us from taking up that challenge. Throughout the whole drama, in which things have happened on a large scale, pain and suffering, beauty, power, joy, love, heroism, and horror have been shown in synchronization with the individual human being—Napoleon; the reference has consistently been maintained with problems of mind and heart of an individual consciousness. Blind Will-force joining up with neutral Nature, in whichever way this process may have started, is allowed to wreak havoc on human life, to despoil and desecrate all sentient life, the fair arts, the fruit and flowers. *The Dynasts* shows nowhere the triumph of Reason or of the noble attributes of the human heart. But the central theme of this drama, the theme of levels of consciousness, rings hard and clear and is never lost sight of.

Pure Intelligence, speaking through the Spirit of the Years, shows up Napoleon's vain and petty thoughts as hollow mockery; the down-fallen despot's retrospective reconstruction of another possible order of events which, if only he had acted thus and thus, could have consolidated his imperial power, are shown up as a mean trick for escaping the innate responsibility which Napoleon's own self has developed and made it increasingly difficult for him, in his thoughts, to ignore. Napoleon, like most human beings in rare moments of fundamental questioning, faces the real issues, but easily allows the mood to degenerate into calculations of small gains and losses, and the devising of subterfuges to evade the operation of natural laws. Even if it is not its business, as merely the recording Spirit of reason, to point out what courses Napoleon should have taken if he were a 'great man'—as Napoleon thought himself to be¹—the Spirit of the Years is at least determined to shatter Napo-

¹ Act VII, Scene 9, p. 520.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

leon's illusions of self-importance and even of his place in history. Says the Spirit of the Years:

Worthless these kneadings of thy narrow thought,
Napoléon . . .
Such men as thou, who wade across the world
To make an epoch, bless, confuse, appal,
Are in the elemental ages' chart
Like meanest insects on obscurest leaves.
But incidents and grooves of Earth's unfolding;
Or as the brazen rod that stirs the fire
Because it must.

On this note the drama of *The Dynasts* ends.

After those last words of the Spirit of the Years—

The moon sinks, and darkness blots out Napoléon and the scene.

CHAPTER V

THE DYNASTS—THE AFTER-SCENE

THE After-Scene, in which the Spirits meet in the Over-world, not only is a summing-up of valuations but also marks a further and a final extension of the fundamental poetic principle. The latter comprises the different reactions that we have seen the human personality making, in its several aspects of mind, intuition, and feeling, to the drama of *The Dynasts*. This part is organically linked with the Fore-Scene, and also to the point of development shown in the last phase of the Napoleonic epic of Will.

This great Drama of the Will has been shown on such a wide panoramic plane that we may easily have been led to identify it with the whole of the drama of the Universe, of which it is merely one incident. What we have been shown has posed us the immense problem of Existence, but, as the Spirit of the Years reminds us,

. . . Yet but one flimsy ribband of Its web
Have we here watched in weaving—web Enorm,
Whose furthest hem and selvage may extend
To where the roars and plashings of the flames
Of earth-invisible suns swell noisily . . .

and it goes on to warn, 'inutile all—so far as reasonings tell'.

We have seen that Pure Reason is meant to refrain from offering any final judgement—it speaks in recognition of its own role and does not transgress its sphere. The farthest it can go in recognizing the principle of a new growth in the Universe is to admit that

Already change
Hath played strange pranks since first I brooded here,
But old Laws operate yet . . .

(Fore-Scene.)

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

Logic dares not yet, in Hardy's drama, concede too much to the new factors of consciousness, which have not so far succeeded in the Napoleonic cataclysm in withstanding the ravages of blind Nature's Will. It is the purpose of human consciousness to inform Reason with new values; thus is it that Reason and experience integrate and develop the human personality as we know it. This task of making the human Will creatively conscious and active by ceaselessly checking, consulting, and informing Reason with apprehensions of truth, the Pities fulfil at every step; and in the closing symphony of the Drama their message reaches a sublimity of prophetic utterance.

The Pities point out the illogicality of Reason's attitude in not allowing the possibility or the potentiality of consciousness even to the vast universe of Nature, since, according to Reason itself, consciousness on the Earth has been born out of the heart of Nature, though both seem to it to be equally purposeless. The validity of consciousness has been granted by Reason, and so the Pities take that admission for granted; the problem here converges into the totality of the Will.

Thou arguest still the Inadvertent Mind.—
But, even so, shall blankness be for aye?
Men gained cognition with the flux of time,
And wherefore not the Force informing them. . . .¹

The mystery of the gradual *informing* of the Will, that is to say, of the spread of consciousness, is raised. The Spirit of the Years does not question this statement of the Pities, but, as if to give more chance to Pity to make its contribution to elucidate the problem of existence, asks:

What wouldst have hoped and had the Will to be?

Pity's Chorus joins together the different threads of speculation, and for the first time we have a complete fusion of the values which we have been elaborating under the varied forms

¹ p. 522, After-Scene.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

and functions of Nature's Will, the principle of consciousness, the Prime Cause, the emergent idea, &c.

Humanity, in its urge to realize a coherent principle which must comprehend the various aspects of reality, has given names and symbols to some innermost unity that it has perceived in its farthest reaches of realization. In a modern manner Hardy makes an approach towards some finality or an Absolute of truth from the point of view of Will, and consciousness as the unifying principle of creation—and this idea he has been pursuing throughout the Drama. We have in this noble Hymn of the Pities the characteristic word 'Wellwiller', which gives expression to the supreme idea of Will that the eventful Drama, through the words of Compassion, has given to us.¹ On this comprehending idea is based the realization of the 'Great Heart'—an idea which we have seen developed in the third section of the Drama, paradoxically enough not before but after sufferings have been repeated, hope has been shattered to the dust, and evil shown almost in an overwhelming form. Here the Chorus speaks of the All-comprehensive power

Whose eye all Nature owns,
Who hurlest Dynasts from their thrones

and yet who is a power that *'lifest those of low estate'*.

No attempt is made to deny the problem of evil and suffering; but as, after seeing a drama of Shakespeare in which storms have raged and human passions wrought havoc with human lives, we have yet felt curiously reassured by the simultaneous presence of the supreme beauty and nobility in the drama of life, so here too, on the basis of that realization, Pity dares to raise its hymn to the Will in whom it had trusted—a Will which has not prevailed in this drama but is not therefore necessarily disproved: it may yet be born out of the throes of humanity—the will of the 'great and good' which can redeem

¹ 'Will', here, is apparently identified not only with a purpose but a realized beneficent purpose: Pity seeks to use the idea of Nature, Will, &c., to express its sense of some *logical* power of goodness.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

existence. So, given a chance to express what it would have under ideal conditions (and, according to the events of this drama, hypothetical conditions), Pity takes the opportunity of stating its innermost faith.

Yea, Great and Good, Thee, Thee we hail,
Who shak'st the strong, Who shield'st the frail,
Who had not shaped such souls as we
If tender mercy lacked in Thee!

It is true, as we know from experience, that much of our suffering cannot be explained nor does it seem to have had any obvious purpose—

Though times be when the mortal moan
Seems unascending to Thy throne,
Though seers do not as yet explain
Why Suffering sobs to Thee in vain.

The very fact that all our possibilities of knowledge are not exhausted, that these sufferings seem to need further explanation, the 'unscanted scope' of Truth, in Pity's language, affords us in itself a food for final hope. From this thought the song makes a leap to the summits of faith:

Therefore we quire to highest height
The Wellwiller, *the kingly Might*.¹

The Pities end this hymn by saying, as if in challenge to the Years:

So did we evermore sublimely sing;
So would we now, *despite thy forthshowing!*¹

It is important to face with full consciousness the varied aspects of Nature and Humanity; to the modern mind this poetry of full consciousness, of analysis, this attempt to unfold a process, seems more satisfying, perhaps, than that which proceeds from the final faith, the resulting reassurance which proceeds from the victory of consciousness and therefore leaves conflict out

¹ *Italics mine.*

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

of the picture. The Wordsworthian note, the belief in the *realized* perfection of Nature, seen in its rhythmic working and manifest harmony is given a place at the end of the Drama and contrasted with the discords of Nature that are also present. There are the rejoicings from the heights of faith, after they have been reached with effort and travail. The Pities hymn the harmony of the Universe, the supreme law of joy which preserves the stars from wrong, the law which Wordsworth saw inseparably linking up Nature and the human heart.

The systemed suns the skies ensroll
Obey Thee in their rhythmic roll;¹

indeed the whole galaxy of stars seems to 'ride radiantly at Thy command', though it is also true that when the divine purpose, which the mortals yet cannot understand, wills it, then the time may come when these stars too 'are darkened by Thy Masterhand'. We do not know why flowers of light should blossom and fade in the immense space, but so it is.

Then the Pities come to the Human Nature.

And these pale panting multitudes
Seen surging here, their moils, their moods

—they also remain in the heart of the Abiding Eternal. Human beings 'fulfil their joy' in the Supreme Spirit, for there is this human experience not only of suffering but of the fulfilment of joy—a fact which cannot be ignored. The Hymn closes while the multitudes of Humanity, joining in faith,

Exultant adoration give
The Alone, through Whom all living live,
The Alone, in Whom all dying die,
Whose means the End shall justify! . . .

This is a state of faith, but it is not a faith which has refused experience, but, on the contrary, gained its substance through the realities of experience. So the Spirit of the Pities com-

¹ The Pities, p. 523, After-Scene.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

ments that they can 'sublimely sing', not intimidated by the spectacle of history, but, as it tells the Spirit of the Years, 'despite thy forthshowing!'

The Pure Intelligence cannot admit the validity of this faith, but it reveals significantly that there is 'something' in the words of the Pities which has values of its own and which strikes 'chords' not 'consistent with our spectacle', but which

Almost charm[s] my long philosophy
Out of my strong-built thought.

And it tells Pity that it is almost taken back to the early times when it 'thanksgave thus', though it cannot do so now,¹ referring to the early stages of humanity when the rudiments of Reason were one with instinctive faith. That identification of Intelligence with primitive intuition is not possible to-day, but it is a fact that in the primitive mind there is an easy harmony between Reason and faith which the modern mind, with its stresses and strains of consciousness, finds it difficult to achieve. Reason's power has to be achieved anew; in Hardy's Drama we have seen Reason faltering, questioning, admitting, and groping its way through assertions and adventure. Reason almost pathetically appeals:

Ay, start not, Shades;
In the Foregone I knew what dreaming was,
And could let raptures rule! But not so now. •
Yea, I psalmed thus and thus . . . but not so now!

Characteristic of the modern Age, Hardy's analysis of Reason is yet touched by a poetry which we seldom see in current

¹ Deep in the heart of man dwells the belief that in the dim infancy of creation all was well with him, a time when in his wholeness of self and natural innocence he could believe without intellectual doubts, and be happy and grateful as children are happy and grateful. Arnold, as it has been noted, spoke of the time when 'The sea of faith was . . . at the full'; Wordsworth, oppressed sometimes by the modern world-weariness, wished for the simple faith and rejoicings of primitive man. The Spirit of the Years says that once, in some happier time far back in the past, it could also offer joyous thanks to creation; but now, apparently because of its growth in reasoning powers and experiences gained in time, it can no longer do so.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

literature. At the same time, as we shall have occasion to discuss later on, the attempt to apply the Spirit of Reason to reorganize human society is more characteristic of the modern temper than that which informs Hardy's Drama.

There is a chorus of the Great Questioning of Reason; Reason baffled by the apparent slowness with which its full illumination comes in the course of years:

O Immanence, That reasonest not
In putting forth all things begot,
Thou build'st Thy house in space—for what?

O Loveless, Hateless!—past the sense
Of kindly eyed benevolence,
To what tune danceth this Immense?

Reason again admits that there is somewhere the principle of a 'kindly eyed benevolence'—referring perhaps to the evidence of Pity—but it is futile. Suffering comes because, according to Reason, the events of existence are beyond the control of consciousness. Reason cannot but register the fact that there are events which, while they act beneficently for some, are at the same time doing quite the opposite to others; the powers of creation are therefore 'Loveless', 'Hateless'. But we have not yet understood the problem itself; perhaps the effort to understand, as translated in action and also in thought, will not only make Reason understand but create 'conditions' which will in greater measure reveal life's beneficence. *The Dynasts* does not state this, but the effect of the events and arguments may be to induce us to think along these lines. Reason in this Drama has nothing more to say, and comes once more to formulate its question briefly.

The Ironical Spirit frankly expresses its inability to explain, but with its fundamental sympathy and honesty says:

But I know
'Tis handsome of our Pities so to sing. . . .

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

Yes, to sing the praises of this mysterious, dumb, neutral Force which 'turns the handle of this idle Show'. Irony fails on the supreme heights, and cannot reconcile its combination of attitudes, which has its own value on the lesser planes of thought. This failure usually records itself in philosophies of illusion, which, very justly, Hardy makes not Pure Intelligence, but the Spirit Ironic, elaborate. Paraphrasing from Aeschylus¹ the Spirit Ironic develops this philosophy from *Maya*, Unreality, which curiously does not see that in denying reality to anything at all it denies reality to its own existence and to its philosophy also—which is not a very helpful contribution to make. It says:

As once a Greek asked I would fain ask too,
Who knows if all the Spectacle be true,
Or an illusion of the gods. . . .

Hardy denies any right of speech at all to the Spirit Sinister in this final Act of the Overworld.

Before the Spirit of the Years makes its departure from the scene it puts its question in a final form, which is, Hardy explains, taken from the Classical Age:²

Last as first the question rings
Of the Will's long travailings;

the question of the Will and the purpose of its struggles—the fundamental question of Reason in *The Dynasts*.

Attempt has been made in this survey to show that, contrary to current conception, Hardy shows different aspects of belief in this drama. This may not have been the result of a deliberate purpose: it is the result of the fundamental activity of the poet's mind in *The Dynasts*. And the evidence of a great work of art must be sought perhaps only in its intrinsic operations, which may even, almost in spite of the creator's conscious opinions, lead him to develop the deepest logic of his being. Especially in the work of a genius the message lies organized in the work itself; Shakespeare is all there in the totality of his works.

¹ *Agamemnon*, Chorus 478.

² Hor. *Epis.* i. 12.

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

In *The Dynasts* we have not only been shown with great poetic justice a full perspective of life as seen through the various elements of the human personality, but Reason itself has fully faced Reality and not ended on a note of scepticism, despair, or fatalism, but on an attempt to face the problem of consciousness, which runs through all existence. In its final words it says that it has seen but not understood why 'The All-mover' and 'The All-prover' ever drives Things on their course,

Heaving dumbly
As we deem,
Moulding numbly
As in dream. . . .

It admits that this is only a statement made according to its own limited powers—'as we deem'—and that so far it does not 'apprehend' what the full significance of creation may be, nor 'how fare the sentient subjects of Its scheme'. The problem posed by the simultaneous presence of 'It', the Unconscious, and of the sentient creation is left unsolved by Reason.

It could have been expected that, according to the logic of Hardy's poetry, the Pities should have had a few final words to complete the human note of the drama. But there is not only a rounding-up of argument but a vivid touch added by a reference given by faith to '*a genial germinating purpose*' in Nature, in which lies the hope of perfection yet unrevealed; a perfection which is one with and is a part of the 'loving-kindness'¹ that the heart has seen and felt. With moving effect we are reminded about the elements of pain and suffering which form such a great part of our human experience, and whose operations in history we have been shown graphically. From our modern point of view we can add that Nature evidently will yet take time to be 'humanized', and there will evidently be much misery yet in store for us. We are inclined to say that Pity can only appeal to the principle of conscious suffering:

¹ p. 525, After-Scene.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

through our suffering we may know how to build up the new Dynasts. Here Pity speaks only in general terms of some 'genial germing purpose' and does not deduce that suffering is essentially connected with that purpose; the bridge between the two ideas might be supplied by the logic of the *process*, as it appears in some modern poets. Pity here says that if there is to be suffering and death, let extinction, for sentient beings, be 'swift and sure'.

Then sounds the supreme aerial music, the joyous, spontaneous hope which is in the heart of Life itself. The hope, one might almost say the insistent demand, which in its final crystallization appears in the last six lines of *The Dynasts* is that man's consciousness may triumph; that the operation of the Purposive Will may fashion existence into significant form. It is not the expectation of some speeded-up solution of human problems but a concrete and rationalized emotional apprehension of the farthest reaches of thought, which makes Pity link up the primal dance of matter in the evolution of the Earth, on which we dwell, to the succession of life, leading up to the birth of humanity and of human consciousness. This linking-up process, the meaning of which Hardy does not attempt to unravel, has not evidently succeeded, so far, in achieving full control of the elemental, which is bound up with human life and consciousness.

But—a stirring thrills the air

Like to sounds of joyance there

That the rages

Of the ages

Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that were,

Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair!

Here the implication again is mainly that the neutral forces of Nature, described variously as 'It',¹ 'Will', 'Prime Cause',

¹ It has been pointed out before that Hardy himself mentions having used 'It' in an original sense. Freud's '*Id*' is a definitely scientific notion, and with his usual consistency

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

&c., will no longer remain out of harmony with the principle of consciousness which is somehow born out of the process, but that Nature herself will become more and more cognizant as human consciousness impinges on Nature and there is a closer correspondence between the two; a correspondence, in fact, which will tend to become more and more a coherence.

he has kept its use within the sphere of psycho-analysis, not attributing any moral values to it. But the use of the *Id* to cover indefinitely the entire range of activities for which the conscious human mind does not hold itself responsible has become fairly general to-day, and has therefore lost its precise significance. Groddeck claims (*Exploring the Unconscious*, by Georg Groddeck, Daniel, London, 1933, p. 210) that he has got the word 'It' direct from Nietzsche. Since the conception is still vague and is the subject of much discussion, and as it bears close relation to Hardy's much more profound and original interpretation, it would perhaps not be out of place to quote one or two extracts here from the modern psychologist, to observe the trend of popular discussion. Groddeck covers not only the unconscious but all conscious activities as well with his 'It'. In the same book on the Unconscious he says: 'I believe that whatever happens in or through a man, from the moment of conception to the moment of death, even what he reasons out for himself and does of his own free will as we say, *everything* is directed by this unknown *IT*' (pp. 210, 211).

He continues: 'In my unscientific phraseology, the *It*, when it wishes for any reason to be ill, chooses something from the mass of possible means in the world around, and this it uses to produce certain symptoms, taking this or that definite course according to its purpose. For instance, it makes use of a stone or a bit of orange-peel to slip over and get a broken leg if it does not want to tread the path that lies before it, or it infects itself with some bacillus to work off an inconvenient emotion in the form of high fever.'

In another book called *The Book of It* (Daniel, 1935) Groddeck carries the point farther: 'The *It*-unit at one time expresses its vitality in this manner, and another time in that, . . . helps to make a nail . . . becomes a blood-corpuscle, or a cancer cell . . . or conscious of some . . . phenomena. Health, disease, talent, action and thought, but above all, perception and will and self-consciousness are only achievements of the *It*, expressions of life. About the *It* itself we know nothing whatever.'

It will be noted that the catalogue of the activities of this unknown entity leaves few things in human life outside of its sphere. Such semi-scientific 'interpretations' seem yet able to create considerable impression on modern thought; owing to the observation of certain connected phenomena amateur psychologists have sometimes succeeded also in devising empirical methods of curing a few cases of abnormal behaviour; but the difference between this *It*—a philosophy (or science)—and Hardy's conception of the *process* is too obvious to need elaboration.

I am indebted to Mr. W. H. Auden for drawing my attention to Groddeck's psychology.

CHAPTER VI

THE DYNASTS—ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR OUR TIMES

THIS idea of Nature's becoming conscious is, we have seen, expressed in Hardy's drama more than once with a rich diversity of persuasion; it is a new idea in poetry and fraught with immense significance.¹ It is not possible here to go more deeply into it, but it is essential for us in understanding the whole ferment of modern verse to know how Hardy had seized upon the crucial problem which has been tormenting most of the artists of our modern Age. With the range and power of his mind he has been able to give an analysis which will help us in appreciating the modern phase.

The Spirit of the Pities expresses belief in the immensely enlarged range of power which may be attained by man through the growth of his Will and consciousness, and in the unceasing process whereby the Will, in Nature, may establish its dominion. It is curious that in spite of apparent failure to achieve a stable peace amongst the nations, in spite of our vulnerability to Nature's diseases and the still unchecked havocs of the elements, we have begun to realize that the struggle behind our very failures and especially our acute consciousness of them indicate, perhaps, an intensification of the struggle of human consciousness, and a new measure of advance. Poetry and art, being conscious and integrated in their expression, and the outflow of the fundamental motive forces of humanity, can often reveal to us

¹ 'The assumption of unconsciousness in the driving force is, of course, not new. But I think the view of the unconscious force as gradually *becoming* conscious, i.e. that consciousness is creeping further and further back towards the origin of force, had never (so far as I know) been advanced before *The Dynasts* appeared.' Hardy's letter to Dr. Caleb Saleeby, Dec. 21, 1914 (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 269).

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

the true direction and character of the major events of current history.¹ It will take us too far out of our survey to try to analyse how, in view of the unique manifestations of international harmony and mutual assistance in the political, social, and economic spheres, the attempt that some nations are making to fall into the exclusive herd mentality may well be indicative not of a return to barbarism but of a self-assertive, defensive movement which wants to ensure certain fundamental rights for each nation before yielding to the essential and inevitable acceptance of a collective system.

A parallel may be found in the attempt underlying the Romantic Revival in English poetry. The poets then advocated the rights of the individual and insisted on securing his fullest freedom; but at the same time they preached the gospel of man's corporate social existence, they extended our sense of universal relationship. In the modern maze of complications, in poetry as in life, it would be helpful to analyse our present position in the light of a new endeavour to appreciate the Romantic Movement.² Poetry, in that period, expressed

¹ Cf. Hardy speaks of that 'alliance between religion, which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality, which must come, unless also the world is to perish, by means of the interfusing effect of poetry'. It will be seen how near Hardy is to Wordsworth in his conception of the true function of poetry. Hardy also quotes in the same context the famous lines

the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge;
the impassioned expression of science.

(Introduction to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*.)

² Mr. Edmund Wilson in his brilliant book on the Symbolist Movement does less than justice to this aspect of the Romantic contribution. 'Romanticism,' he says, 'as everyone has heard, was a revolt of the individual. . . . Racine, Molière, Congreve and Swift ask us to be interested in what they have made; but Chateaubriand, Musset, Byron, and Wordsworth ask us to be interested in themselves . . . they vindicate the rights of the individual against the claims of society as a whole' (*Axel's Castle*, by Edmund Wilson, Scribners, 1931, p. 2).

Mr. Wilson strengthens the conventional idea of the Romantic Movement by not stating the more fundamental effort which lay behind it. Shelley he leaves unmentioned in discussing the development of that movement; there is, similarly, no reference to the later Keats, who felt the 'giant agony' of the world, and the need of the individual serving the society to which he belonged. Even Byron, to some extent an egoist, paid the supreme price for his belief in the rights of a people; it is not enough to dismiss his action as a gesture of personality. The Romantic poets were,

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

intense individual feelings in relationship with a social and a cosmic existence; sometimes it was stretched to propagandist limits, or merely registered a revolt against rigid systems of thought, and of society in which freedom was allowed to operate in fragmentary, unrelated competition, and therefore belied its own basis. Coleridge and Wordsworth insisted that poetry should be clear, simple in expression, and unique in the delineation of experience so that intimate communication might be established between the poet and his fellow beings. They carried their comprehensive sensitiveness into the life of the peoples (the ugly word 'masses' would not have come from their pens), noted and observed in detail; in Nature as well as in human nature they found the variations of a unity which they tried to unravel. Contrary to popular supposition, the Romantics firmly laid the foundation of modern thought; the application of rationalized emotion¹ was extended in all spheres of literature.² As Wilson observes, they were careful in

therefore, not putting individual rights '*against*' those of society but were trying to urge the expression of both in their natural harmony.

'The arena', says Mr. Wilson, had been 'transferred from the universe conceived as a machine, from society conceived as an organization, to the individual soul' (pp. 4, 5). There is much truth in this remark, but it is not made sufficiently clear that the real attempt of the Romantics was to break down the old divisions created between the rights of the individual and those of the human society as a whole, as if these were exclusive of each other. Wordsworth's conception of Law was an assertion of the interdependence, and therefore of the fundamental unity, of different aspects of existence; the Romantics were pioneers in introducing the modern era, in which the effort has been consistently maintained to strike at a rational balance between the individual and the collective, guided by an increasing knowledge of correlation between moral, psychological, and material laws.

¹ Cf.—

... the discerning intellect of Man

... wedded to this goodly universe

(Preface to *Excursion*)

said Wordsworth; in his poetry, love of Nature is never separated from the apprehension of Nature's laws by the *reasoning* mind.

² Mr. Crane Brinton in his important study *The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists* (Oxford, 1926) analyses Wordsworth's social philosophy and contrasts the poet's dominant trend of thought with that of his old age. Wordsworth saw that 'If we are loyal to something inside ourselves, then we willingly submit to restraint outside ourselves; and the problem of government is to reconcile external restraint and the inner man' (p. 64).

'Unfortunately,' says Mr. Brinton, 'Wordsworth stopped here, and never sought

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

'describing things as they really are', that is to say they were not by any means subjectivists wrapped up in their cloudy imaginations. In our days we see their effort¹ taking a wider curve, but we lack the clarity of a Wordsworth's vision or a Shelley's intensity of imaginative fusion of ideas, even if our range of apprehension is wider. Modern poetry is in a turmoil of unrealized possibilities; the fact that the human Will cannot at one stroke operate on existence and inaugurate the millennium baffles the younger poets and throws them back on their own excited consciousness. In some of their writings can be traced moods of black despair at the sight of hardening obstacles, the organization of evils, as it were, which makes them seem more formidable though perhaps easier to deal with. For it may be true that evils recognized and offering a collective front may be subdued by the sanity of mankind. In facing the accumulated tensions in wars, and hostility and imperfectly adjusted relationships in human society, the modern poets (aware of psychology, economic laws, and the implications of international security) are seeking for a more satisfying interpretation of life, of beauty, of form and law, and the subtleties of emotion. They see on one side the marvellous growth of civic reforms, mastery over Nature's resources, harnessing of science for social good, amelioration of suffering and disease—that is where human consciousness is asserting its supremacy over the Nature-Will, the 'It', the Destructive Element, or whatever other term we may select. The workings of the human mind, especially of that no-man's-land between the body and con-

to elaborate by patient intellectual effort a political system in consonance with this conception of nationality.'

The point to be noted is that Wordsworth was not concerned merely with the isolated individual; as to the responsibility that may lie with a poet to 'elaborate . . . a political system'—that is another matter.

The chapters on Shelley, Byron, and Hazlitt are specially valuable. Mr. Brinton shows how the Romantic poets were pioneers in introducing the study of politics and sociology in a modern scientific manner.

¹ Hardy describes this process in poetry as *the application of ideas to life* (Introduction to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*), a phrase which Arnold offered as a variation of his own definition that *poetry is the criticism of life*.

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

sciousness, are yielding fresh extensions to reason every day; the study of the layers of consciousness has given remarkable results. And yet at the very threshold of immense achievements mankind is threatened by a world-wide cataclysm of disruption.

Hardy's *The Dynasts* shows the whole spectacle; its message is in its realization of the nature of the problem of consciousness.¹ Evils can be dealt with by palliative measures, but only a combination of them resulting from the assiduous application of the higher Will of Man in every sphere can be remedial.

Since Hardy's *The Dynasts* there has been the shattering experience of the World War; Hardy himself lived to see and suffer agonizingly from it, but the task of connecting his great ideas with the dislocations as well as the possibilities of the age were handed by him to his successors. His prophetic insight into the workings of historical forces has been well recognized; if it be pointed out that *The Dynasts* was wrong in its prophecy if it was meant to indicate the end of the old Dynastic order of wars, the objection is not valid: it springs from an imperfect understanding of the only sense in which the word 'prophecy' can here be used. True prophets are the unconscious medium of truth; it is because of what they are that they represent, without their knowing, their entire age; and it is therefore not to be wondered that Hardy himself was just as unprepared for the War, in spite of his being the author of *The Dynasts*, as any one else. He would indeed have shown himself to be prophet, right or wrong, but of the spurious kind, if he had claimed his imaginative works to be specific forecasting of the future. His concern was to interpret the nature of the process, to make us realize that the events that happen in Nature or in human society are not freaks dissociated in their operation, but spring from the inseparable nature of reality itself. He offers his supreme challenge, in *The Dynasts*,

¹ Cf. 'And what is to-day, in allusions to the present author's pages, alleged to be "pessimism" is, in truth, only . . . "questionings" in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also' (Introduction to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, 1922).

THE PROCESS IN POETRY

to the higher consciousness of man. For he brings before us the recognition of the effort which tends

To grow percipient with advance of days,
And with percipience mends,¹

which is the implied prophecy, if prophecy be needed, of his drama.

The Dynasts has to be recognized in our times in its full worth; the shadows of war which chase across its immense skies, the details of war and blind disaster embodied in its pages, and the varied commentary of the Spirits have been taken as proofs not only of its power but of its fatalism. Hardy has been held up as a preacher of the inevitability of war and of suffering. Inevitable, certainly; but the inevitability, as the previous pages have tried to show, rests with us in a far deeper and more hopeful sense than the usual optimist would imagine.

‘O yes, war is doomed. It is doomed by the gradual growth of the introspective faculty in mankind—of their power of putting themselves in another’s place and taking a point of view that is not their own.’²

With these words, this chapter on *The Dynasts* may be ended.

¹ Cf. Pity’s words ‘mild-eyed Prescience . . .’ (After-Scene, p. 523).

² Interview given to William Archer, February 1901 (*Real Conversations*, by William Archer, London, 1904, p. 47).

BOOK II

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN
CONSCIOUSNESS

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF ANALYTICAL POETRY

LATER nineteenth-century poetry, though characterized by its dramatic and narrative treatment of emotions and idealized events, was turning again to contemporary life. It was becoming 'socially conscious'; new relationships between art and extra-artistic activities were being established. The changing texture of an industrialized urban existence, the problems of large-scale group activities, the developments of science and technique, from all sides affected the atmosphere of thought and made new demands on the creative imagination.

The change in intellectual emphasis and the increasing attention to the social questions to be found in Victorian poetry bear a significant relation to post-War poetry. England's lyric country-side, its mountains and moors, the cloudy vales, the flower-lit greenery, the homely trees and the river-side which move us so deeply in Wordsworth's poetry, the poetry of human relationships, as well as Shelley's iridescent songs of wonder, ecstasy, and pain, have their imperishable continuity in Victorian verse; along with this the poetry too of the analytical mind had grown.

Reference has been made in another section to the poetry of intellectual discontent which appeared in the Victorian Era. The earlier background helps us to understand the next stages. The striving, still mainly abstract, to organize scientific knowledge, to inform its intimations with feeling and moral significance, and incorporate them into poetry, has been traced in Arnold's poetry and in his criticism. Arnold touched the fringe of the modern ferment; the nineties record its deepening tumult. Out of the ferment of the nineties was flung *The Dynasts*. With it the analytical tradition of English poetry enters the Age of Hardy.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

In that drama an artistic coherence was given to the problems of consciousness and of Will posed by modern civilization; Hardy fused his intuitions into a pattern, its multiform character reveals the psychology of our period. Intensely preoccupied with the *process*, he allowed his sense of the perfect to suffer; his poetry often lost the higher flights of lyrical freedom; the inward fulfilments of man who lives in and also above and beyond the *process*, the lights and colours of simple yet inexhaustible beauty, experiences which defy reason because reason itself is but a part of human nature, were seldom admitted into his verse. There are exceptions to the rule; *The Dynasts*, itself, has many such exceptions.¹ But essentially Hardy is the archetype of the modern poet, and his genius has provided a standard by which the trends of our times can be measured.

What then in the light of his drama is the nature of the modernist attempt? Roughly speaking, it is a preoccupation

¹ Hardy very rarely spoke of a 'plan' of the Universe, as he does in a fanciful poem:

Well, it came to an end
Working out as One planned it should work
Ere it came to an end.

(‘Finale’, in *Moments of Vision*.)

But he strikes his characteristic note, not when he is speaking of any super-human *planning*, but in advocating

Life with dependance placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced
With loving kindness fully blown,
And visioned help unsought, unknown.

(‘A Plaint to Man’, *Satires of Circumstance*.)

The nearness of this to the modernist's attitude is evident; there is *belief* in it, so far as belief in the *conscious principle of man* is concerned, but the larger aspect of belief is not here involved. Moderns, such as Auden, seize upon this principle and dwell on the need of using it for reconditioning human society: however ignorant and liable to suffering we might be we can come out of ‘the isolated personal life’ and live in a united fellowship in which ‘our separate sorrows are a single hope’. Auden reveals a faith in the *process* similar to the one expressed in Hardy's poem (quoted above) and throws aside the ‘dream of Heaven’, ‘ecstatic flight’, &c., and relies on the emergent human factor (the quotations are taken from Auden's *Look, Stranger!*, published Nov. 1936)—in Hardy's language, ‘visioned help unsought, unknown’.

THE NATURE OF ANALYTICAL POETRY

with the evolution of life, in all its aspects; it is an attempt to present a logical pattern of existence interpreting Nature and human nature, experiences of evil and wrong and of socially helpful activities appearing together in an extension of consciousness; and along with this one finds in modern poetry a desire to express a new sense of the continuity of Time.

In eras of great social and intellectual activity and rapid external progress, poets are often led to build structures of verse in which current forms of thought and feeling should find simultaneous expression. The modernist attempt has many parallels in English literature, only it is more deliberate than before. There is no need to hunt for foreign sources to prove its originality. The nineties in direct historical connexion are the immediate starting-point of this movement.

In the nineties several centuries of advance seemed to be condensed into a few years; and from that time poets have often been shaken out of the normal rhythm of their personality by the accelerations of our age. Applied science and research in the latter part of the nineteenth century were transforming not only man's daily life but his ideas about life. His conception of the laws of Nature, of the interactions of matter and organism, of the relationship between man and society, nation and nation, was being rapidly and profoundly modified.

Lacking an atmosphere of leisure, many artists and poets were dragged prematurely into self-consciousness. The innocent eye with which the young poet looks at aspects of thought and life to light them up with vision, was presented, as it were, with rapid events which scientific discovery and social reorganization were converging to produce; circumstances seemed to be moving outside the range of his associations; a disturbing interdependence binding man and Nature, man and society together at each step, was beginning to affect his outlook and introspection.

Mankind all the world over was coming to realize its co-existence in a manner unknown to any other age. History

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

was digging up layers of sand, splitting the atom, and pursuing the star-uncovering continuities; it sought evidence from tribal custom, cave-drawing, and script; in a hundred ways it was making the past re-live. In space and time the search went on; in the meanwhile the spread-out map of races and peoples was being drawn from far corners and put together. The home of life, this Earth, had been charted, circled, soon enough it would be known by the new aerial sight. In the nineties man's imagination struggled with sudden extensions; and the power of the human Will, its part in the world-process, its responsibilities, assumed a new significance. The contradictions, disharmonies, and frustrations of existence appeared more challenging than before; it seemed to be a paradox that while so much power was being wrested from Nature, and its secrets mastered, man's relationship with man was yet far less than human.¹ The problem, therefore, was to find some central principle in the world-process by which not only Nature but human consciousness is governed; and, above all, to identify that principle, if possible, with the human purpose.² The

¹ In order to appreciate the ferment of ideas in the nineties, it is necessary to go farther back to the philosophical writings of Carlyle, Ruskin, Kingsley, Herbert Spencer, Samuel Butler (to mention only a few names); to the critical works of Pater, and Gosse (who also translated Ibsen); to the works of William Morris, Andrew Lang, Stevenson. Ideas from all branches of knowledge, social questions, scientific thought, and history were being poured into English literature during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In a separate section (Appendix I) the activities of some of the poets and other writers of the nineties will be discussed from this point of view. To a modern critic the nineties may well appear to have been more a period of newly emerging ideas and bold experimentation than that of 'decadence' or exhausted thinking power. Even the birth of 'social conscience' in modern poetry can be traced to that period, and in the poems of such unlikely authors as Wilde; while we also find that poets of the Rhymers' Group, labelled as pure aesthetes, could bother about evolution. Speaking of Davidson, in *The Beardsley Period*, Mr. Osbert Burdett remarks:

'Indeed he was inspired more than once to sing the view of the world which the theory of evolution has brought with it . . .' (p. 182).

The part played by some other poets of the nineties, in this direction, will be dealt with in a later part of this section (and in Appendix I).

² Cf. Hardy's note to the newly formed Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: 'A Society for the relief of suffering is entitled to every man's gratitude; and though, in the past century, material growth has been out of all proportion to

THE NATURE OF ANALYTICAL POETRY

perfectibility of earthly existence had to be confirmed by the knowledge gained in different spheres of thought and experience, through metaphysics, science, and the arts. The poets of the nineties were all in some way or other trying to express their ideals in terms of a revaluation of material existence.¹

The seventeenth century, following upon the tumultuous awakenings and expansions of the Renaissance and of the Shakespearian Age, offers the nearest parallel; but there is a difference in the degree of self-consciousness, a real difference, which gives its particular character to each succeeding stage of civilization. Much more than it would have been possible in those days, the modern poet is deliberate in his attempt to include different spheres of life and examine diverse problems of outer circumstance and of psychological conflicts. The poet of the nineties, of whom Hardy is a characteristic example, tried to preserve an awareness of himself in whatever he was doing; one feels his analytical mind working even when he moved in the depths of his poetic creation. The persistent demand which Hardy made upon his consciousness sometimes chilled his embers just when one expected his verse to leap into

moral growth, the existence of your Society leaves one not altogether without hope that during the next hundred years the relations between our inward and our outward progress may become less of a reproach to civilisation' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. ii, p. 86).

¹ This process began notably in the writings of Morris, which wielded great influence on the nineties. A poem like Stephen Phillips's *Christ in Hades* could hardly have been possible without this new attitude towards social readjustment. Richard Le Gallienne quotes a poignant letter from Phillips on lead-workers (*The Romantic 'Nineties*, p. 156); from Phillips to Masfield's humanitarian poems is a logical line of development.

Chesterton in his characteristic manner remarks, in speaking of the general attitude of writers belonging to an age vaguely labelled as Victorian:

'It had all the vices that are now called virtues; religious doubt, intellectual unrest, a hungry credulity about new things, a complete lack of equilibrium. It also had all the virtues that are now called vices; a rich sense of romance, a passionate desire to make the love of man and woman once more what it was.' (*Autobiography*, G. K. Chesterton, Hutchinson, Nov. 1936, p. 143.)

Chesterton's paradoxes always contained a gleam of sober truth: he tried to dispel the mist of popular misconception with regard to the period which first brought in self-consciousness to modern literature. (His *Victorian Age in Literature* is a stimulating book.)

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

flame; in our day, the modernist poets have carried the deliberate, connecting, co-ordinating, analysing process almost to a logical *reductio ad absurdum*.

Scientific self-observation had been a feature of the Symbolist Movement; the mystics of the nineties whether on the heights or in the depths seldom left at home their recording instruments. Yeats's early poems move in a curious half-world of science and ecstasy.¹ His Autobiographies, Reveries, and critical essays reveal a self-conscious 'reporting' mentality which would have been foreign to the Metaphysicals, or to those of his contemporaries such as Hopkins, Patmore, or Francis Thompson, who belonged to an earlier tradition of mysticism; though, even in the latter, belief, naturally, is not based on the acceptances of an earlier epoch.

The Imagists, who appeared later to carry on the nineties' tradition, worked with hammer and hatchet; except in a few odd verses of Pound, H. D., or Aldington, a few lines of Flint, the wood-choppers had chased away all the birds from the forest;² blocks of dead timber were displayed proudly by them as the realistic tree of life. They were morbidly self-conscious, and the effect of their poetry was deadening. The Sitwells coming later manufactured synthetic poetry according to recipe; feelings and thoughts were labelled and catalogued and mixed not in the mind or in the heart but in the laboratory. The flower and foliage of poetry were replaced by metallic cubes, the atmosphere of colour reduced to a brazen varnish; their

¹ Even when he deprecated the use of 'the optic glass' by 'the starry men' (*On the Song of the Happy Shepherd*) Yeats was really expressing his kinship with them; if he never studied astronomy he practised astrology, crystal-gazing, &c.; and his fervour in those activities was at least as realistic as it was mystical. In A. E.'s poetry there is a good deal of occultism, but A. E. identified himself with his faith; the make-believe atmosphere of Yeats's Danaan shores and *sidhes* is absent. Yeats, however, succeeded in making better poetry than his colleague even out of his early preoccupations with Red Hanrahans and Black Pigs, and in spite of his mixture of science and mythology.

² In the first volume, *Des Imagistes*, there are certain poems of Pound such as the one beginning with the line 'Be in me as the eternal moods' or his 'Return' ('See they return') which show a new sense of form; free verse here finds reticent expression. *The Hermes of the Ways*, by H. D., is a fine poem; Aldington's *Choricos* has passages of beauty.

THE NATURE OF ANALYTICAL POETRY

poems were images not of life, or of anything else, but of their own monotonously uniform doctrines, held with the zeal of 'Onlie begetters' who work in groups. *Wheels* made four annual revolutions and stopped. It was only when, like their predecessors, the Imagists delved into the mystery of subconscious memory and dwelt in the past that they wrote lines of 'relaxed associations' not unredeemed by subtle intimations of feeling; in bucketfuls of verse drawn from the 'nameless unformed', strange, beautiful objects would occasionally appear embedded in the submarine slime. Lawrence, it will be remembered, though he never wholly identified himself with Imagism, appeared in the Imagist anthologies, and his 'instinctual' poetry traces a further stage in the mix-up of scientific theorizing with induced moods. His birds, beasts, and flowers, some of them ingenious enough, are brought in with a few sharp strokes of observation, some genuine splashes of feeling, only to be covered over with irrelevant catechism, sex propaganda, expression of opinions. Lawrence, a typically modern self-conscious writer, reminds one of an amateur scientist; on the whole his biology, his theories of the Unconscious, and his social ideas were not as unreasonable as they sounded, but he never completely mastered his knowledge. In any case his poetry badly suffered from the intrusion of what was at bottom pedantry, and though his imaginative prose has added some fine pages to English literature his poems lack the unity of an organic work of creation.

The work of the post-War poets shows the analytical frenzy side by side with a more balanced realism. Subjective preoccupations are still struggling with a utilitarian zeal, but the struggle may lead to a harmony; the social conscience and artistic activity are not incompatible. In the meanwhile Mr. Blunden, in a fine poem, has issued to them a timely reminder:

Agree, the way to live
Is not to dissect existence.¹

¹ *In My Time* (London Mercury, Jan. 1936).

CHAPTER II

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

THE revival of the poetic drama is the latest phase of modernist literature. Two poetic dramas published in 1935 and recently performed on the London stage, namely *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden's *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, can be chosen for comparison with Hardy's *The Dynasts*. They have broken, it is claimed, new ground in technique and psychological method: whether praised or blamed—and the two dramas have not been put on the same level—they have both appealed to the modern temperament. Day Lewis's recent production *Noah and the Waters* (1936) has not been staged, but it belongs to the latest phase of post-War poetry; Stephen Spender's *Vienna* (1935) is a narrative poem, but it introduces dramatic elements in a manner characteristic of this period. These two books therefore will also be discussed in relation to Hardy's drama and his interpretation of the modern Age. They do not, as mentioned before, adequately represent their authors: in the case of Eliot and Auden, however, their plays can be accepted as their most mature and characteristic productions so far.¹

In *Murder in the Cathedral* Eliot has gained distance from the blinding intimacies of contemporary life and its problems by projecting them into an earlier historical background. The factual veracity of his play need not concern us here, though the successful representation of one of the most well-known themes in the religious life of the country, which has inspired English poetry from the time of Chaucer up to Tennyson's drama on the martyrdom, can be readily admired. But the

¹ *The Ascent of F6*, which has been published since these pages were written, will be referred to in the footnotes; though it shows a firmer grasp of the requirements of the stage, and is more direct and coherent as a narrative than its predecessor, it lacks the poetry of the Choruses, and is not so directly 'post-War' in its psychology.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

atmosphere of Eliot's play is charged with the tension of modern conditions, with the modern form of the struggle of belief: the language and the psychological method belong entirely to the post-War period. More even than *The Rock*, where Communists and Fascists were introduced to enliven an early period of English history, this play touches the core of modern self-consciousness. Hence the power of the play and its popular appeal in spite of its theme being a twelfth-century conflict between the Church and the State.

The shadow of War moves on the whole of the drama. Not merely war as an event, crime and violence, murderous instincts appearing isolated and in mass combination against the sanity and the moral order of civilization, but the whole problem of the blind instinctual urges of life conflicting with the higher powers of consciousness is portrayed with vivid realism.

The premonitions of death, of disaster on a large scale, are expressed mainly in the choruses:

Is it the owl that calls, or a signal between the trees?
Is the window-bar made fast, is the door under lock and bolt?

Death has a hundred hands and walks by a thousand ways.¹

¹ p. 42, Chorus, Priests and Tempters alternately. (Also pp. 40, 41:

There is no rest in the house.

There is no rest in the street . . .)

Cf. Hardy's lines:

Sore are the thrills of misgiving we see
In the artless champaign of the harlequinade,
Distracting a vigil where calm should be!
The green seems opprest, and the Plain afraid
Of a Something to come, whereof these are the proofs,—
Neither earthquake, nor storm, nor eclipse's shade!

(Chorus of the Pities, *The Dynasts*, Part III, Act vi, Scene 8.)

Mr. and Mrs. A. (symbols of Everyman and Everywoman in Auden's latest play) thus converse:

Mrs. A. I have received singular warnings:

In the eyes of the beggar I have experienced the earthquake and the simoon.

Mr. A. Sitting in a crowded restaurant, I have overheard the confabulations of weasels.

Mrs. A. Give us something to live for. We have waited too long.

(*The Ascent of F 6*, p. 20.)

This conversation precedes the beginning of dramatic events. A lapse into superstition

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

In the choruses of *Village Women* the fear of the unknown as well as that of recurrent evils darkens the air.¹ There is the persistent blight which leaves the child without milk in summer,² deprives workers of their labour, spreads destitution and disease, and threatens entire masses of mankind with increasing fears of extermination. The chorus of *Women* is used for giving passionate and spontaneous expression to the feelings both of individuals, and of humanity in general, when faced with the inexorable antinomies of the free urge of self-consciousness and the frustrations of material existence. There is, moreover, the impending fear of a sudden calamity. The *Women* speak of the unseen terror³ of which 'the forms take shape in the dark air':⁴ they express the agony of humanity enmeshed by a collective insecurity and struggling to find anchorage in a concrete belief.

The consciousness of the problem of evil, of death in general, and of the wrongs and mortifications of life has always haunted man's mortality, but what makes the choruses modern is their insistence on a more self-conscious form of the terror and struggle of the human spirit:

'... But now a new terror has soiled us, which none can avert, none can avoid, flowing under our feet and over the sky.'⁵

connected in our times with a feeling of growing unrest and insecurity seems also to arise out of the memory of the War and a lurking fear that another deluge of evil may suddenly descend with a world war. Signs and symptoms of such an impending calamity are sometimes even welcomed as bringing a hope that the intolerable suspense may end; any certitude, even if it be that of a disaster, brings relief. There also arises the wild thought, in the mind of people thus panic-stricken, that what will follow may be a better state of things—as it could not be worse.

¹ pp. 12, 13, 18, 19, and throughout the play.

² p. 43.

³ p. 19, 'But now a great fear is upon us . . . '.

'Fear' and 'terror' seem to be the symbol of man's reaction to some destructive principle in Nature, the 'It' of Hardy, the Mephistopheles of the ages, the 'Enemy' or the 'Dragon' of Auden's latest play. This fear, in Hardy's drama, is shared by the animals, but in man it has reached a special intensity.

⁴ p. 43.

⁵ The phrase *over the sky* is significant.

The 'new terror' is a direct reference to the fear of modern wars, raining death and suffering from earth, air, and sea.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

This 'new terror',¹ which indeed could hardly have existed in this psychological form in Thomas Becket's time, but increasingly haunts modern mankind, appears in Eliot's play from the beginning to the final tragedy.

'We are not ignorant women, we know what we must expect and not expect'²

cry the women: it is this terrible fear of disaster on a colossal scale, something so organized and mechanized that 'none can avert' it, which paralyses their lives. In Hardy's drama the Spirits in their combination in an individual mind arouse the agonies of modern self-consciousness, and the whole scene of civilization is viewed from that angle. The crowd in *The Dynasts* is not afflicted by the harrowing form of terror which is characteristic of large multitudes in these days who have known a War and seem to live in the shadow of another. Eliot's crowd is a self-conscious crowd: what was present in *The Dynasts* as a sort of infection of self-consciousness finds a general materialization in the modern play. Hardy's prescience has found a post-War corroboration.

As the age of industrialization advanced in Europe the growth of nationalism, of the modern machinery of government, of conflicting international economic and political commitments, tended to create in the minds of individuals a sense of interdependence without a corresponding sense of security. Acquisition of power was there, but its use seemed to be denied to men.

There was a feeling of deeper unities, the benefits of collective enterprise were recognized and won in many fields of national and world co-operation, but the organization of equity, on which alone could be founded the freedom of the individual conscience and its material self-expression, and also therefore the laws of social liberty, was felt to be lacking. In terms of

¹ Largely a product of morbid sensitiveness—and characteristic of a condition in which the Will is not operative, and emotion, failing to find an adequate outlet, turns upon itself.

² p. 42.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

psychology and morals a peculiar intensity of apprehension, an analytical sense of the disparity existing between human powers, its purposiveness, and the still extensive areas of the uncontrolled in human society, is a modern phenomenon. There is no torture more acute than the realization that we are 'living and partly living'—that phrase is repeated by Eliot's Chorus with great effect—when the human spirit has already felt the possibilities of a larger existence. With the resources of the material and the spiritual world lying within our reach the majority of human beings are yet hardly able to eke out more than a fractional existence. Ruled by inconscient desire and instincts we plunge the world into a chaotic scramble for possessions which makes us lose more than we get. We have not mastered the secret of living.

Eliot, like Hardy, draws Nature, storms and winds as well as birds and beasts, into his scheme of premonitions and weaves the cosmic forces into the tragedies of death and suffering. What gives significance to the whole drama is an implied consciousness of continuity maintained through the apparently conflicting manifestations of purpose and futility. Significance, indeed, as in *The Dynasts*, has come with the activities of our higher being, with the reaction of the 'Spirits' of Consciousness which are now involved in the drama of existence; the tragic element lies not only in the plight of the peoples, their helplessness, or the specific fact of the murder at the end, but because all these events baffle the logical linking-up of the modern mind.¹ The problem resolves itself into the function of the

¹ Professor Abercrombie makes this point clear in analysing *The Dynasts*: 'In fact, the very faculty of formative desire which in art actually does master the world, into a sort of cognition sublimated by will and feeling, is, in Hardy's art, the staple of his tragedy: since without this individual desire which ordinary (i.e. extra-artistic) experience must leave inevitably unsatisfied, existence could not be supposed to have an altogether tragic significance.' (*Thomas Hardy*, by L. Abercrombie, pp. 26, 27.)

The further point made here, that art itself provides, even when its subject-matter is tragic, an evidence of the controlling mind which does give a coherence and unity to the baffling circumstances of life—so that events are not really beyond our control—is particularly relevant in connexion with Hardy's writings. If he often speaks of the inexorable nature of the *process*, he also implies that human consciousness by its very

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

higher consciousness, the means by which it can exert its powers in the arena of life. Eliot's drama seeks some form of spiritual realization which can call in the aid of super-human forces: triumph over circumstances will be gained by making them unnecessary.

Eliot's analysis usually resolves itself into a scheme of religious sanctions. What may be noted here is that in the utterances of St. Thomas the tragedy of living in the stream of the *process* is expressed in forms of thought and expression not far removed from Hardy's. Thomas, idealizing 'necessity', says that we are

Fixed
In an eternal action.

We must suffer 'that the pattern may subsist',¹ but also must transcend 'the pattern' of existence by the virtue of conscious suffering itself:

For the pattern is the action
And the suffering.

Apparently, the pattern gains from the values of consciousness that we bring to it. Human life and action are seen as a design with a spiritual significance, but the individual responsibility is rather in submitting to an acceptance of that truth and waiting for something to happen, than in activities of the will which may change and shape the circumstances amidst which we have been placed. Existence is referred to as the wheel:

The wheel may turn and still
Be for ever still.

nature rises above the process in order to be able to apply its own values and offer a standard of criticism. In the Shakespearian drama the author's mind imposes on the materials with such superhuman power that the evidence of the mind, beyond the reach of any turmoil, conflict, or evil, brings its own message of the perfect, even when the last act of the drama closes on an apparently irredeemable situation. And here, too, Hardy's latent conception of the Will, as a power related not only to Reason but to Compassion, comes to our help: for these qualities, appearing both in the human scene and in the detached creative mind of the unseen author, bring to us a sense of a moral unity which we feel we may help to establish more securely.

¹ p. 21.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

The freedom of the Mover of the Wheel to keep it still or moving was questioned in *The Dynasts* in terms of human understanding of purpose: here the conception is taken outside the range of logic. Hardy, except perhaps in a few poems, a hymn or two, in the words of a few of his characters, rarely expressed any definite attitude of 'faith': but in the chorus of the Pities even a surrender to circumstances is united with a hope for a better life *on earth*. The 'Spirits' operate on the human plane: the minutest details of life are immensely important to them: the drama of human destiny evokes passionate feelings, the profoundest application of reason and understanding. In Eliot's drama, however, the events of life are at best complicated shadows demanding a supreme illumination to dispel them. Though there is a close parallelism of subject-matter, and of the perspective of psychological struggle, the two dramas follow a different scale of values.

In *Murder in the Cathedral* the hymn of affirmation at the end, like the final chorus of the Pities, embraces the entire world of the conscious and the unconscious. But in the Canterbury play existence in itself, without any implications of its pains and the possibility of its perfecting, is hailed as complete affirmation:

. . . all things affirm Thee in
living; the bird in the air, both the hawk and the
finch; the beast on the earth, both the wolf and
the lamb; . . .
Even in us the voice of seasons, the snuffle of winter,
the song of spring, the drone of summer, the
voices of beasts and of birds, praise Thee.¹

The consciousness of man, charged with spiritual faith and transformed, raises itself in thanksgiving—

. . . Man, whom Thou hast made to be conscious
Of Thee, must consciously praise Thee. . . .

¹ p. 84, final chorus.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

In this expression of the Divine, of spiritual union, Eliot's drama moves in a region not included in the dramatic theme of *The Dynasts*. But in the further implication that all problems can be directly set right by an act of religious realization, the modern play runs against the whole thesis of Hardy's drama of the Will, and also against the main current of belief in modern poetry. The co-existence of evil and good, of the wolf and the lamb, of the hurts and struggles as well as of the immeasurable serenities of life would, in Hardy's poem, have to yield to logical interpretation or still remain confessed as a problem. Faith, as expressed in the *Pities*, is open to the intimations of a supreme purpose and consciously surrenders to a joyous assurance which yet it cannot define; but on the plane of thought and action Faith refuses to offer itself as a substitute for the operation of material laws. Neither would it deny reality to the complexities of life and make pain and suffering seem insignificant. Even in its conception of the *process*, therefore, *The Dynasts* should not be taken merely as an expression of 'disbelief'.¹ *The Dynasts* attempts to trace the pilgrimage of consciousness as we *know* it: it stops at the point when the challenge of self-consciousness has to be taken up. While terror rages in the life of the peoples, death and

¹ This has to be said in spite of Mr. Eliot's criticism of Hardy's belief in *After Strange Gods*. After making the remarkable statement that Hardy was 'unhampered by any ideas', and that Hardy wrote 'for the sake of self-expression . . . and the self which he had to express does not strike me as particularly wholesome or edifying matter of communication', Eliot goes on to say that 'it is only . . . in their emotional paroxysms that Hardy's characters come alive' (pp. 54-5). There is a great deal of matter in this passage which need not be analysed here, but it must be pointed out that in Hardy's characters emotions always suggest the Will, and they are never separated from concern for humanity, and for amelioration of suffering and wrongs.

The following lines from one of Hardy's poems can be quoted here in this connexion:

Much has been won—more, maybe, than we know—
And on we labour hopeful. 'Ailinson!'
A mighty voice calls: 'But may the good prevail!'
And 'Blessed are the Merciful!'

Calls a yet mightier one.

(*Compassion*, in *Human Shows*, by T. Hardy.)

disaster hold them in their thrall, Eliot makes Becket appear, as a man amongst men, himself greatly responsible for the turn events have taken, and holding power to exert his help. In response to passionate pleadings of the multitude, to save them, to guide them in setting things right, he gives to them his supreme gift of martyrdom. This assertion of a power higher than those of mortality, and of known laws, is not preceded by any attempt, in the Christian sense, to relate the higher life to life on earth, or by any effort to direct mankind along paths of service which can help them in bringing earthly existence nearer to the kingdom of heaven. The divine elements in life, the powers of higher consciousness operating in human history, the goodness of men and women, their impulses and will for righteous earthly life, are never mentioned.

The terror-stricken, suffering, starving people are asked, 'Does it seem strange to you that the angels should have announced Peace, when ceaselessly the world has been stricken with War and the fear of War?' Becket, in his great sermon before the denouement, invoking men's faith in the 'voices of truth'—truth revealed supernaturally—and giving them the assurance of the final realities, further asks, 'Does it seem to you that the angelic voices were mistaken, and that the promise was a disappointment and a cheat?' He then gives them a definite intimation that the promise of peace would be fulfilled by his own martyrdom. That would solve their problems of war, of starvation, of fear; the Chorus, consisting of shadow individuals who do not individually seem to matter and have therefore been given no character to distinguish them from one another, accept this message and wait. Becket shows his trust in their power of endurance by demanding, in his sermon, that they must be prepared to receive peace in the guise of dire tragedy; the weak conception of Peace which identifies it with comfort is denounced. But they are not given, before or after the tragedy, any guidance as to how the onset of Peace can

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

be turned into its true self, how suffering can be made to conquer obstacles so that man's real life on earth can be established.

Eliot, living in this era of self-consciousness, and of the struggle between reason and accepted belief, does not offer faith as faith, as it would be done in the twelfth century: he proposes it as a substitute for one's responsibility to share and change the conditions of one's fellow men; faith is a miraculous exit from the condemned evil which is life. Sensitive and conscientious beings must be taught how to 'sit still even among these rocks';¹ they must wait to be delivered from the Original Sin with which life is accursed. The Victorian concession to 'necessary evil' Eliot does not share, for the world is not even necessary; it may be an unnecessary evil. Spiritual contempt for humanity makes its doings seem pitifully small and unmeaning; men and women, whether appearing as bones, hollow or empty men, shadows or paper scraps, hideous sinners or decorous Chorus patterns, wait for martyrdom, rain, or a knock on the door to vanish with all their thoughts and doings, feelings and aspirations.

In *Murder in the Cathedral* the only living characters are the murderers; they breathe more fully than the personages in *Sweeney Agonistes* who are not even able to commit crimes wholeheartedly—or to go to the Crocodile Isle—for fear of the sudden knock. The Tempters are meant to represent types, and they do so effectively; as individual characters they make little impression. They make set speeches and disappear. The priests in *Murder in the Cathedral*, like the people in *The Rock*, never become fully real, though sometimes they talk in staccato verses. The other characters in Eliot's poetic writings form a part of 'a sorry scheme of things entire', and offer a perpetual apology for their existence.

In Hardy's drama, as in his stories, for all their determinism, the frailties and human sufferings of men never fail to express

¹ p. 21, *Ash Wednesday*.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

the dignity of human life;¹ even the lower creatures share the majesty of existence, they are already greater than the massive unconscious. Life's tragic failure, so far, to control Nature, is the pivot on which Hardy's poignant epic turns; even as a process, therefore, life reveals its momentous significance. The Sweeneys and Burbanks are different from Hardy's men and women because the latter are invested with the warm reality of life; behind their folly and unreason are shown great and enduring qualities of the head and heart; the joys and hopes of humanity are implied in their actions. Eliot's characters are paralysed by self-consciousness; their plight is worse than Hardy's most pathetic fate-ridden character, because, though they are given some Will, they remain in a state of suspended animation; while the puppet, even in the land of Spirit Sinister, can at least blame the strings for not pulling it properly. The figures in the Chorus of Eliot's recent play, therefore, represent not the twelfth-century peasants, but the self-conscious moderns who speak of 'new terrors', of 'living and partly living', and who display the tragedy of functionless Will. They must carry on till the rain descends and the curse is over.

The saintly character of Becket is a new and welcome event in Eliot's poetry of character; he is a further development of the figure of *The Rock*, and often uses the same language, the same sentiments, and the same spiritual arguments, as his symbolic predecessor. Evidently, Eliot's entrance into the theatre (the stage-performance of *Sweeney Agonistes* was a slight affair) had taught him much; Becket moves with a surer step than *The Rock*, and dramatically he is far more convincing. From the viewpoint of this survey, his character can be judged only

¹ Hardy's reverence for humanity inspired many of his poems—single lines often stick in the mind, as, for example, when he speaks of

the store

Of human deeds divine in all but name . . .

(*A Broken Appointment*.)

While assessing Hardy's total attitude, not only his moods of unbelief (sometimes expressed in dramatic variations to represent particular characters) but his sense of the importance of good deeds and loving kindness has to be considered.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

as a further expression of Eliot's faith; the skill with which Eliot has blended his own religious beliefs with the character of the martyr must win our admiration. The tradition which started with vague references to the third figure on the rock in the *Waste Land* was further developed in the vision of the Virgin Mary in the *Ash Wednesday*; it became the *Rock* in the pageant play; and now it is further continued in the character of a Saint offering a miracle to his men. The other tradition, too, has developed and continued; the *Waste Land* ghosts and the evil beings of the 'Aristophanic Melodrama'¹ have become *wilful* criminals in his latest play, but since they begin to take responsibilities and even try to justify their crimes (rather cleverly) they are much more likely to be cured.

But the bridge which joins the two traditions is still unreal; the world of Becket and the *Rock*, and the world of the other men and women, hardly admit of connexions. Eliot thinks in too rigid categories; the history of numerous men and women who have moved, and still move, between godliness and unreason he dismisses without recognition, and yet they form the bulk of humanity. It is for this reason that Eliot's philosophy as expounded without any exception in his poetry, including the *Murder in the Cathedral*, has room only for Saints (or miracles) and Sinners (waiting for the miracles). The efforts of all those others living in between—if the 'sinners' can be separated from the 'Saints'—mean little to Mr. Eliot. It is difficult for him, therefore, to recognize any development in human society;² while Hardy saw the emergence of the higher

¹ *Sweeney Agonistes* is so called by its author.

² In his new collection of essays Mr. Eliot has made his position clear in many passages. In commenting on some lines of *In Memoriam* he says: 'These lines show an interesting compromise between the religious attitude and, *what is quite a different thing*, the belief in human perfectibility' (italics mine). The 'religious' life flourishes in some sphere which excludes the 'material' life, and therefore need not bother about what may happen to the latter.

In another place he says: 'The hope of immortality is confused . . . with the hope of the gradual and steady improvement of the world.' 'Hopes' need not ask for automatic improvement, but such disdain for the 'world' (which for him, it seems, is not a part of reality, or belongs to a low category) rules out the principle

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

Reason, of Compassion, from the whirlpool of instincts, and built his hope for mankind on the totality of growth, Eliot can only admit that

The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us no farther from God and nearer to the Dust.

The same doctrine is expressed in the words of Becket,

We do not know very much of the future
Except that from generation to generation
The same things happen again and again.
Men learn little from others' experience . . .
. . . Only
The fool, fixed in his folly, may think
He can turn the wheel on which he turns.¹

If it is such a folly to try for any reform or change in our condition, what then is the individual—or the human race—to do? They must wait for a miraculous termination.

End will be simple, sudden, God-given.
Meanwhile the substance of our first act
Will be shadows, and the strife with shadows²

says Becket.

There is no necessity for action; faith is offered, almost, as an alternative to action. The preservation of spiritual patience, without which man's Will cannot sustain itself nor achieve its objects, is in Eliot's drama identified with spiritual fulfilment. Becket would not have the priests or the people take any initiative to avert calamity, they must wait for the inevitable;

Heavier the interval than the consummation,
All things prepare the event. Watch.³

of effort and of growth embracing the whole of existence, which to many are fundamental to a conception of immortality. (The quotations are from *Essays Ancient and Modern*, by T. S. Eliot, 1936, Faber, pp. 186, 187.)

¹ *Murder in the Cathedral*, p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³ Speech by St. Thomas (p. 23).

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

One of the Tempters approaches St. Thomas with the plea for action on the material plane:

To set down the great, protect the poor,
Beneath the throne of God can man do more?
Disarm the ruffian, strengthen the laws,
Rule for the good of the better cause,
Dispensing justice make all even,
Is thrive on earth and perhaps in heaven.¹

An argument to which Thomas replies by asking, 'What means?' And the Tempter replies that the means is to obtain 'real power', by which, however, he meant power purchased at spirit's cost:

Real power
Is purchased at price of a certain submission.²

Such submission, of course, is not possible for Thomas, but he rejects also the idea that there can be found a method of using power without sacrificing the spirit; that the duty of the spiritual worker may well be to find out how to use the laws of life in harmony with the divine life. In Eliot's poems this aspect of spiritual responsibility is not envisaged; Becket here, faced with life, rejects it. He denounces

Worldly order
Not controlled by the order of God³

without considering whether even man's efforts could not make the Divine Order control the Worldly Order; and

¹ p. 27.

² The situation and the arguments used here closely parallel the first scene of Part II of *The Dynasts*, where Gevriillière tries to convince Fox that

The sovereign remedy for an ill effect
Is the extinction of its evil cause,

and in proposing a morally indefensible course of action says,

A deed's true name is as its purpose is.

Fox, however, like Becket in this drama, thinks that even

To do the right deed for the wrong reason

is a 'treason'—his argument is rather that to do the wrong deed for the right reason is a betrayal; and he attacks the 'unconscious hardihood' of Gevriillière.

³ *Murder in the Cathedral*, p. 30.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

Becket does not, true to Eliot's philosophy, even try to face the implications of the faith 'which keeps the two 'orders' apart. Again, they are separate and unbridgeable (how they appeared separately is not explained) an attempt to raise the one up to the level of the other, to relate the two by our effort, would brand us as a 'fool fixed in his folly'.

Eliot comes very near to Hardy and to most of his own contemporary poets, who have in them what Shelley called a passion for social reform, when he indicates in this play the inescapable collective suffering which each individual must share with his fellow beings:

. . . for every evil, every sacrilege,
Crime, wrong, oppression and the axe's edge,
Indifference, exploitation, you, and you,
And you, must all be punished . . .¹

says Becket, before the events begin to move precipitously. This idea of 'punishment' must involve some sense of personal responsibility, and the will to change—at least for escaping from suffering.²

At this point reference can be made to Auden's play, *The Dog Beneath the Skin*.³ This drama, in spite of its lightly

¹ *Murder in the Cathedral*, p. 45.

² In a magnificent passage in his diary, Hardy expounds the idea of collective suffering as a principle of Life; his conception, unlike the puritanical creed of punishment which Eliot puts into the words of Becket, combines a singularly modern interpretation of the evolutionary urge with a sense of the physical and moral unity of mankind:

'March, 1896.

'Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever "Love your Neighbour as Yourself" may be called, will ultimately be brought about I think by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be and possibly will be viewed as members of one corporeal frame. . . .'

(*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. i, p. 294.)

Several times in *The Dynasts*, the Years, in showing the 'anatomy of life', hint at a vast physical unity of all life; but the Years draw no moral significance from it by advocating the exercise of humane faculties ('mercy I view, not urge', say the Years).

³ Auden has collaborated with Christopher Isherwood in writing both this drama and *The Ascent of F 6*, but, since part of the prose and all of the poetry are Auden's, he has been referred to throughout as the author of the two plays.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

incidental character, deliberately chosen, and the advocacy of a panacea for the cure of social and political and psychological difficulties, is seriously concerned with the problems of war and violence. The sufferings of self-consciousness, which form the central theme of *The Dynasts* and Eliot's Canterbury play, are presented here in an ingenious manner. With Auden the problem resolves itself mainly into that of liberating the human will from the clinging coils of inhibition, and of the various secret allegiances which, by the vestigial habits and instinctual urges, deflect the activities of the conscious mind. In *The Orators* this theme was elaborated with the obscure references to modern psychology in which Auden chooses frequently to wrap himself; but in this play the pull-back of what Hardy would call the tyrannical Unconscious is challenged, and the conscious purposive part of the human personality is pitted against the frustrating suction force of Nature. The instinctive life of an ancient order of society which made Man accept evil and suffering, and all too readily make virtue out of weakness, finds a merciless and often aggressive ridicule from his pen. He is out to 'expose' the beliefs and social systems which thwart instead of express life:

. . . Life lurks, evil, out of its epoch—

(p. 13)

life, that is, of a wrong past.

Auden, too, takes advantage of the *Chorus* motive, in Hardy's psychological manner, to indicate the diverse workings of individual minds and also to produce a sense of mass consciousness. It has been noted how Hardy, in the Choruses of the different Spirits, was expressing not forces outside of the human personality but the different qualities which compose it. In Eliot's play the four Tempters are cleverly used, and their historical associations exploited, to reveal the psychological conflict of forces in the mind of St. Thomas. The technique, though ancient enough, has been given in Auden's play, as

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

in *The Dynasts*, a modern psychological value. Without any far-fetched ingenuity parallels could be drawn between the different Tempters and the interplay of the Spirits of Irony, of Pity, the Spirit of the Years, of the worldly Spirits (of Earth and of Rumour), and, finally, the malignant Spirit—the Spirit Sinister. Auden uses the Leaders of Semi-Chorus Numbers One and Two to offer a running commentary upon events; the psychological purposes are indicated by them from the beginning, and they bid the adventurers ‘remember the Two’.¹ The Chorus in Auden’s drama exposes the interplay of motives, at crucial moments before action; it warns or directs, and in the Epilogue the Chorus finally comes to sum up the story and draw the moral significance. Semi-Chorus I and II are, however, not clearly differentiated, they speak more or less as one person; their importance lies in the atmosphere of psychological struggle which they help to create.

The play suffers from the rather crude device of making the hero move about, almost throughout the play, in a Dog’s skin. On the stage, too, this trick, intentionally employed to produce a slightly ridiculous circus-play atmosphere, over-reaches itself. The real motive is psychological, the Skin is intended to cover many theories.

Sir Francis is as far removed from Napoleon as two characters could well be, and in a modern, semi-macabre, half-bantering psychological manner Auden proceeds to show how Nature can assume disguises, to give a false idea about the real power of an individual. Nature can take revenge by hiding human potentialities under lowly guises or preserve fateful weaknesses behind the powerful exterior of human despots. Hardy’s Napoleon is made to seem a mask, he is indeed the bondman of the Unconscious masquerading as a free spirit; his blind

¹ In *The Ascent of F* 6 Mr. and Mrs. A. play a somewhat similar part, but, as with all the characters in this later production, the human element appears more naturally and predominates. Mr. and Mrs. Everyman of Suburbia, even if they are presented with an exaggerated bareness, do speak as human individuals, not as a vocal cerebrum, in the characters of Mr. and Mrs. A.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

subservience to brute forces assumes the form of tyranny trying to impose itself on human affairs.¹ Hardy handled a great theme in a great manner; Auden's semi-comic skit is related to Hardy's drama only by a psychological connexion. This connexion, however, is fundamental, even though the expression of ideas in Auden's play is rather chaotic, and is made lurid with a combination of music-hall wit and political propaganda.

The dangers of unscrupulous leadership, the tragic appearance of Nature's ruthless forces in the deluding figure of 'Men of Will', the hypnotic influence which the display of power wields on masses of men by operating on their unaroused minds and driving them as sheep to slaughter, are evident all around us to-day. Hardy was singularly ahead of his time in seeing the issue so clearly. Auden's play, which has many direct attacks on dictatorship, mass-obedience, and suspension of will-power, scores a few hits. But his purpose is more to attack those who allow themselves to be victimized by false leadership and by the stirring up of herd passions than the false leaders themselves. He takes it almost for granted that the sanity of English people can see through the business of dictatorship without much difficulty; but he would not spare those who, knowing this, yet allow circumstances to paralyse their will, and are, therefore, liable to fall before another storm. The human being, animal-like though he may be in many of his failures, in his old instinctive habits, hides beneath the Skin great unrecognized powers which, when brought forth into open light and action, show us to be what we really are. At present, however, it is safer for the real leader of men to hide under an animal disguise, since people would not then object to his presence, being used to animals; they would hamper his movements if, before he is prepared, he allows himself to be recognized. But the time

¹ Compare Ransom's exaggerated self-condemnation when he identifies his ambitious mountaineering leadership with the so-called heroism of blind tyrants: 'My minor place in history is with the aberrant group of Caesars: the dullard murderers who hale the gentle from their beds of love and, with a quacking drum, escort them to the drowning ditch and the death in the desert . . .' (*The Ascent of F* 6, p. 87).

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

of crisis comes when the Leader throws his skin aside and saves the man who is about to collapse. Then he leads a party to march under the banner of a new belief; and they declare themselves against the old subserviences and will-lacking drift of the past.¹

Auden has as usual mixed up the theme with obscure psychological 'sublimation' and political propaganda; the main issue, moreover, is often lost sight of in pursuing different purposes; added to this, Auden often lapses into the code-language of his own private associations. But this play brings him nearer to coherent thinking and presentation than any of his previous writings.

In many ways continuities with Hardy's *The Dynasts* could be traced in this play. Not only in the peculiar employment of the Chorus, both to suggest inner conflict and to project a background of social life, but in other technical devices, Hardy forestalled the moderns. The first few lines of Auden's play remind one of Hardy's cinematographic method of showing the movements of life from different planes.² Sometimes small objects are made enormous so as to dominate attention; moles and rabbits and earthworms are made to depict the gigantic cataclysm of the War by their helpless suffering; whole countries, landscapes, and seas shrink into diminutive space, and men are seen crawling like ants in that queer perspective. Hardy, in depicting the Napoleonic scenes of battle, gave pictures both from a modern air-pilot's point of view and also

¹ Ransom, the mountaineering hero in *The Ascent of F 6*, though a born leader, fails because secretly he carries the domineering impulse to power rather than a desire to serve—which is the prerogative of leadership. (He also possesses the mother-love complex, whatever that is.) Ransom's fine heroic qualities almost bring him to the top; in the final struggle he discovers the source of his weakness and gains a clear conception of the character of moral integration.

² It is strange to find an admirer of Hardy's novels complain of the *technique* of *The Dynasts*: 'This mighty work may even repel by the anachronism of its machinery!' (*The Human Pair in the Works of Thomas Hardy*, by Pierre d'Exideuil, p. 179). Professor Quiller-Couch, writing on Hardy's poetry, remarked on the originality of Hardy's technique which 'lays Europe beneath us, "flat, as to an eagle's eye"' (*Studies in Literature*, by Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, vol. i, p. 207).

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

employed the cinema device of throwing spotlights on certain scenes and events to single them out in clear visual forms. When Auden shows

Europe and the islands; many rivers
Wrinkling its surface like a ploughman's palm

and then goes on to throw his searchlight on an English village here, or houses, rivers, suburbs, in the distance, he is employing the same method. Distance and perspective are gained by this means. We are shown by the Chorus flashes of 'Europe hidden in shadow', 'The Rhine catching the moonlight for hundreds of miles', 'Night in England; Over Lincolnshire and the great churches', 'Glimpses of the constellations between their pinacles'—the searchlight moves and lights up one scene after another.

But this rapid change of scene and perspective is a device employed, as in Hardy's drama, not only for variety but in order to reveal the larger unity; there is an attempt to portray the conflict in human society as a whole. The shadow of universal suffering is there everywhere in Auden's play. His references invoke concrete imagery of war: 'The sky is darkening like a stain', sing the Leaders, and add:

Something is going to fall like rain
And it won't be flowers.¹

Human beings are gripped in cities and streets and factories, everywhere, by the dull impotency of despair; humanity is shown as a victim of a general epidemic:

Their faces grey in the glimmering gaslight: their eyeballs drugged
like a dead rabbit's,
From a window a child is looking, by want so fretted his face
has assumed the features of a tortoise:
A human forest: all by one infection cancelled.
Despair so far invading every tissue has destroyed in these the
hidden seat of the desire and the intelligence.²

¹ Chorus of Both Leaders, before Act I.

² Chorus before Scene 5, Act I.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

Indeed, the whole life of Europe, whether in pleasure or business, in personal preoccupations or common futilities, in all the departments of political and social activity, is shown up as being secretly and subtly infected by a constitutional disease of the Will, threatening further dissolution. Sometimes with light banter, frequently with satire and caricature—the play moves round and round this one central theme of impending disaster.¹ The over-done 'realism' of the play, unfortunately, has marred it as a serious poetic achievement. The balance which Auden has tried to maintain between a poetic drama and a variety show has not been successfully achieved. The attempt, however, to use colloquial phrases and topical lore has its own importance.

The main target being the ordinary individual, who chooses to lie wrapped up in inhibitions, and fears to let reason sit in authority, this play uses the surgeon's knife to dissect modern life in its numerous phases. Almost no institution is spared, no habit of mind and body left unexposed. Vices and organized crime as well as social and political institutions are scathingly attacked. Here again, over-emphasis has defeated its own end, for the whole of human life, without distinction or discrimination, is shown up as a uniform spectacle of futility. The Chorus from pp. 155-7 is a veritable hymn of hatred. Three small words appear in the last stanza as counsels of perfection—'repent', 'unite', 'act'—but, arriving in that bare form after a catalogue of human stupidity and viciousness, they fail to make their mark.²

It is significant, however, to find that in this play the Spirit

¹ Mr. and Mrs. A. in Auden's newest play speak of the interminable vacuity of their lives—'the old, old story that never ends' (p. 18); they ask, 'Shall we be like this when we are dead?' They are 'sick of the news', of 'politics, politics everywhere': the only break in this death-like monotony will be provided by an even grimmer mass-immolation—'When will they flatter us? . . . When there's a war! Then they will ask for our children . . .' (p. 19).

² The more recent writings of Auden, as it has already been pointed out in the section dealing with his poems, show a deeper note of understanding: moral indignation does not find an escape through mere hatred—though hatred of evil is there and

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

of Pity has been allowed its voice, even though very rarely. There occur those moving lines in the Chorus before Scene 5:

O human pity, gripped by the crying of a captured bird wincing
at sight of surgeon's lance
Shudder indeed: that life on its narrow littoral so lucky
Can match against eternity a time so cruel!

Much as the 'Financier' is hated for all that he supports and is protected by, he is not painted with undue harshness; the pathos of his personal loneliness, of his imprisonment by the very methods which have given him power while fettering his humanity, has been effectively brought out. There is something touching about the scene in which he confides in a youthful stranger and tries to gain his friendship. A very effective scene again is the one in which, in spite of an attack on institutional religion, the curate, in the last scene of the book, is shown in his genuine spiritual belief. The curate is faced with a choice between two allegiances—wrongly made to seem as excluding each other—and though he is half drawn to join in a new socio-political movement, he chooses to stick to his own life of devotion;

Christ crucified
Be at my side,
Confirm my mind
That it be kind
To those who assert and hurt
On either side!

I must go away
I must go to pray
To One who is greater (p. 175)

a clear-eyed recognition of it—it builds on the basis of love. The Chorus in *The Ascent of F 6* admits this:

True, Love finally is great,
Greater than all; but large the hate,
Far larger than Man can ever estimate. (p. 118.)

Here the usual order is reversed; it is the problem of evil which claims consideration, not love, as in most of his earlier works.

says the curate, much as the Spirit of Pity in *The Dynasts*, almost overwhelmed by circumstance and by the cold persecuting logic of the Spirit of the Years, declared, in defiance of a general atmosphere of disbelief, his unshakeable and augmented faith in the 'Great Heart'.

'Greater than who?' asks Auden's military general; to which the curate answers with simple dignified finality, 'Greater than you', as he goes out:

This play is in some ways an antithesis of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. War and suffering and terror, the multitudinous frustrations of human beings, are the theme of both plays. But whereas Eliot places his emphasis on a miraculous salvation and dwells mainly on the need of spiritual illumination, in the other play the message is very definitely that human life by change of conditions within and without must be driven forward to a better state by the power of the liberated human Will. While the individual is repeatedly asked to look into himself:

Look in your heart and see;
There lies the answer (p. 14)

for

. . . Motives like stowaways
Are found too late;

and is admonished for yielding to habitual comforts, to herd allegiances, insistence is also made on the necessity of winning freedom by increasing and applying one's social consciousness. Eliot does not touch this issue.

The best gifts of the individuals have to be developed and offered for the general benefit of human kind; the direct relationship of social responsibility with individual freedom is always stressed: 'To each his need: from each his power', demands the Chorus, in the concluding line of Auden's play.¹ So that, in the regenerated society, cleansed of individual

¹ p. 180. (The well-known Communist phrase re-stated admirably.)

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

neurosis and mass disorder, will be created a condition where

Time flows on as chalk stream clear
And lovers by themselves forgiven
The whole dream genuine, the charm mature
Walk in the great and general light
In their delight a part of heaven
Its furniture and choir.

(p. 180.)

The idea of humanity moving in the happiness of a 'great and general light' is stressed; and to remove this conception from appearing as a mere wish-fulfilment, detailed analysis of the social process has been made. A change-over to the new order is proposed as the necessary and realistic basis for a future which will make 'the whole dream genuine'.

Choose therefore that you may recover: both your charity and
your place

Determining not this that we have lately witnessed: but another
country

Where grace may grow outward and be given praise,
Beauty and virtue be vivid there.¹

(pp. 179, 180.)

The stress laid here on exploiting our modern growth of knowledge, of self-consciousness, for the purpose of transforming the whole process of life, is typical of post-War poetry; it is an attempt to work out in greater detail—and the attempt is often a failure because of deliberateness and a certain narrowness of vision—what Hardy called the 'mending' which will come with 'percipience'. This latest development, which often expresses itself in peculiarly intimate and often disconcerting cataloguing of 'man's crowded uncleanness of soul' and indulges in political and social prescriptions, owes its drive to an obscurely and inadequately felt responsibility. The restlessness and impatience with life are not due to disbelief but rather

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS
to a turbulent faith in our possibilities and in our powers even
though circumstances may be difficult.

Man is changed by his living; but not fast enough¹

and therefore remedies are proposed which will make things
move faster, remedies which were not fully known or applied
before. The manner in which the remedies appear, and the
language of expression, are given a post-War flavour:

In the hour of the Blue Bird and the Bristol Bomber his thoughts
are appropriate to the years of the Penny Farthing;
He tosses at night who at noonday found no truth.²

Auden is conscious of death, of psychological terrors and
life's futilities, but his zest for life and a boisterous sense of fun,
a sense, too, of the queer incompatibilities which go together
in life, have sometimes dragged him out of his psychological
obsessions. He is conscious of

The expansive moments of constricted lives
In the lighted inn³

and demands that life should give more chance to the expansive
moments, that arbitrary restrictions keeping individuals from
wider intercourse and equal citizenship should be removed.

Only the briefest reference need be made here to Mr. Day
Lewis's recent aquatic mystery play of *Noah and the Waters*
and Stephen Spender's political waltz *Vienna*. These two poetic
productions carry the application of *Will* in the *process* to the
crudest form of propaganda. Day Lewis invokes the 'waters
of the world' to unite, instead of using the usual war-cry;
while Spender, basing his analysis of the Western civilization
on a ghastly political tragedy in Austria, advocates as an answer
to violence and bloodshed equally unsparing violence on the
part of the victims. The human element of Auden's play, its
vivid satire, its movement of life and interplay of incidents,

¹ *Dog Beneath the Skin*, p. 13.

² Chorus, p. 13.

³ Chorus of Both Leaders, p. 15.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

are lacking in these two productions. Spender's *Vienna* fails because neither has the historical background been made vivid enough nor has there been any attempt at characterization. Day Lewis has not successfully introduced into his unreal atmosphere of a 'morality play' much of contemporary life, even though his purpose is obviously modernist. Both these poems are so directly concerned to apply specific remedies that their prescriptive concern damages the poetic reality; there is no atmosphere of significance which alone can make propaganda effective in a work of art. Neither of the poems goes as deep psychologically as Auden, or in moral and spiritual analysis as Eliot.

And yet, characteristically enough, both of these poems deal with the chronic disease of war, and are acutely concerned with the misuse of human consciousness, its failure to control the blind forces of Nature. They attempt to see human events in the background of the age and seek a radical cure by which the directive consciousness of Man can change social and political conditions.

The fear of war, the memory of long-continued disaster, are often expressed; the diabolical play of instincts is depicted as signs of the battle waged by *It* or the *Inconscient* of Hardy, against the conscious life.

European life, as usual, comes in for heavy handling. Whether it is

The Town.

. . . The uniform foliage of roots, hiding decay . . .¹

with its

. . . Nurseries that splash crude colour over war's pale griefs,
Nurturing seed for a soil shallow as soldiers' graves:

Huts, the butt-ends of a war, Honour's sloven retreat;²

or the doomed citizens breathing 'the bandaged air',³ the

¹ *Noah and the Waters*, by C. Day Lewis, p. 14.

² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³ *Vienna*, by Stephen Spender, p. 16.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS
creatures of 'metal limbs', 'glass eyes'—the picture of humanity
is grim indeed. The description of the unemployed—

 Their eyes are fixed upon an economic margin¹
—or the thoroughly mechanized lives of
 Those who, going to work early, behold the world's
 Utter margin where all is stone and iron,
 And wrong,²

are pictures of death in life; life frustrated by evil.

 Life? Life? . . .
 . . . In back streets,
 In rooms with bugs, in courts with sunless flowers
 Where radio crazily jazzes
 And the gross arms of women beat their carpets.³

And over this all broods 'fear' which 'breeds death'.⁴ The
terrible incidents in the Viennese story are outlined by Spender
with occasional inspiration of a phrase, a vivid metaphor, and
very rarely with the passionate flair with which sometimes he
can infuse mere protest with an imaginative power. There are
lines such as—

 It is not death we fear but that a memory
 Reported in our veins as absolute peace
 And scrolled on buildings built by ancestors
 Should turn an agonised, deathly face . . .
 Now the past builds no peace, for harmless bombs
 Ticking in bushes, shock us with their bangs,
 Tearing anonymous limbs from senseless corpses.
 The settled mountain, the background to our lives
 Slides its burnt slopes, where legends told
 Our parents walked with God.⁵

And even amongst crude descriptions of fighting there is a cry
like this which grips one with a sudden feeling:

 Bomb bomb bomb trumpets drums flutes
 Oh lamb of God spare us

¹ *Vienna*, by Stephen Spender, p. 19.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

Aeroplanes tanks gas battleships
Bursting waves oh lamb of God
Pity us.¹

But then all the tiresome description of over-done realism, reiteration of political phrases, choke the stream of the poem with verbiage.² At the end of the poem, without any effective handling of the essential theme, of the motives and means of regeneration involved in the salvaging of humanity, Spender goes on adding fragmentary events in a journalistic report. Warlike methods and class-retaliation are enumerated and a hope expressed in those who, by some miraculous and unexplained means, extract the kernel—

Beneath the monstrous shell of ruins; altering
The conformation of masses, that at last conjoin
Accomplished in justice to reject a husk.³

If Spender's poem does not supply any link between the use of particular technical means and the changed motives, and fails to bring out the value of the redeemed purposes which can lead to any interior change in human society, Day Lewis's play also is equally lacking in psychology, and falls back upon obvious paraphrasing of propagandist plans in verse. All the waters of the world must unite, from high and from low, on the same level of a general flood, but how this mingling of humanity is to be accomplished is not shown, either through any illumination of feeling or by the poetry of human endeavour. The upper waters have wrongly looked upon the lower

Waters as an element
Necessary, subordinate, unfeatured,⁴

and used them as

God given . . . scavengers⁵

¹ Ibid., p. 22.

² 'The building materials used by the socialist municipality are of such inferior quality that the new working-class tenements will soon fall to pieces' (ibid., p. 23). Sentences like this are deliberately woven into the texture of sometimes admirably controlled dramatic verse.

³ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴ *Noah and the Waters*, p. 49.

⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

for the favoured chance possessors of the goods of life. But the balance, apparently, can be restored only if the scavengers become a scourge and reverse the role. Though the object of the poem is to arouse a feeling of unity, by insisting on the necessity of a class-strife in order to demonstrate this unity the play loses its force. The Flood, which is the saving, moving symbol of unification of the less-favoured humanity, must reveal the mentality of oppressors and perpetuate the operations of destructive forces which, presumably, they are meant to counteract.

Your profit is our loss.
Your life is our death¹

says the Flood and soon comes to a more positive declaration:

. . . Not a war to eternity this, but a war to the death:
The war of worm and flesh, of oak and the weeds that twine
About her breathing wood. One like grass possessing
The power of myriad weakness; one, the weakness of power.
On Noah is poised that issue. Which way will Noah lean?²

Noah makes the choice with rhetorical speeches which spread out and fail to convey, and takes to the Flood, which for him means 'unremitting war'³ and 'undisguised' hatred, even though he often uses such expressions in a metaphorical sense. We have thus been brought to the end of a cycle; preoccupation with the *process* in agitated minds has become an indirect advocacy of blind warfare. Hardy opposed consciousness to the forces of war, of violence, of hatred; his allies were Compassion, Reason, and Irony. By choosing the Spirit Sinister as their guide the young poets of the *process* are blinding their vision and making the post-War period appear as if it is heading for another Napoleonic cataclysm, wilfully brought about, only under other names. Day Lewis has tried to use his Two Voices as 'Death-will and Life-will', but evidently his play makes the

¹ *Noah and the Waters*, p. 35.

² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

'Life-will' use all the weapons of death.¹ The effect of his final vision, therefore, of the great meeting of 'All rivers, rains and seas' is that of a general devastation; Noah, it is told, 'Beholds a land greener' and is delighted 'as a man returning from exile', but the picture of a titanic flood sweeping across everything can hardly admit a foothold to our imagination. Spender's *Vienna* ends with the hope that heroism will be rewarded, that those who gave their lives in a fight against evil will in the future be claimed as our real 'ancestors', but apart from the fact that in his story the heroes are martyrs, and were not prompted by burgesses to play the part of a deluge-making Noah and therefore claim our respect, there is no indication given that in the fight against wrong the creative worker will not be victimized by his own 'Destructive Element'. Hardy takes particular care, at the end of *The Dynasts*, to make this point clear—in the form of an ideal formulated by the spirit of Compassion;

Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashions all things fair!
is the last line of his drama; 'fashioning' means the work of a creative artist, one who can by power of the higher Will use inclement materials to make 'things fair'. The moral warrior, who would lead the creative forces in a fight against wrong, does not borrow the blind destructive weapons of the *process*,² but

Promptly tending
To Its mending
In a genial germinating purpose, and for loving-kindness' sake . . .

¹ Hardy's argument against warfare, whatever its cause, was that

. . . hurt and slain
Opposed, opposers, in a common plight
Are scorched together on the dusk campaign.

(*Spirit of Rumour*, Part II, Act IV, Scene 5.)

² Hardy, in his fight against cruelty, oppression, and inequality, was against the blindness which makes

men's passions, virtues, visions, crimes,
Obey resistlessly
The mutative, unmotivated, dominant Thing . . .

(*The Dynasts*, Part II, Act II, Scene 3.)

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

works for social integration, removes disharmonies, readjusts. Eliot, in opposing the 'unseen terror', the persistent 'blight', would have the crowd take recourse to faith and prayer, and there is no doubt that even from the material point of view the most potent method of making the higher consciousness prevail over the blind forces of Nature is to remove inhibitions by faith, and create an atmosphere, resulting from the inner assurance, which may lead men to make the higher life operate in the *process*. Eliot, however, fails to lay sufficient emphasis on the reconditioning of life; excepting for a few lines here and there, the bulk of his poetry tends rather to make the inner cure and the outer action contradict each other. Auden tries to reconcile the moral and material 'cure'—spiritual conversion is also indicated—with the imperatives of social activity. Spender, in his earlier poems, saw the effect of beauty and of harmony—he evidently draws much of his poetry from music¹—on human conduct, but he has not so far developed his ideas along that line. Day Lewis hopes that the vision of a more perfect condition and a plunge into the dark will somehow achieve a readjustment of the *process*. Analytical consciousness, characteristic of post-War poetry, has evidently brought out the different elements necessary for a re-valuation of life; but these elements seem so far to lie scattered separately, the Muse has yet to come to play on the different notes together on its golden lyre.

It is a common feature of this period that poets, driven by some pragmatic impulse, have left the Parnassian heights and entered the toiling plains. They have evidently taken up burdens heavier than they can bear.² But there is no reason

¹ His poem on *Beethoven's Death-Mask* is an interesting experiment.

² The acceptance of responsibilities, sufferings undergone for a worthy cause, may build up, according to Hardy's poetry, a higher form of heroism. Speaking of the anguished Queen of Prussia, before the battle of Jena, one of her companions remarks:

Her heroism
So schools her sense of her calamities
As out of grief to carve new queenliness . . .

(Part II, Act 1, Scene 5.)

This heroism which wins because it refuses to use the weapons of evil, and strengthens

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

why this adventure should not be recorded in great verse; indeed, there is every sign that modern self-consciousness will add to Poetry, as different movements in literature have done, its own genuine contribution.

The development of the poetic drama is a hopeful feature, it has brought the poets near to their public, and a note of balanced realism has already appeared in some of their recent works. Exaggerated self-consciousness had kept the poets imprisoned in their theories and unreal beliefs; lacking the power to communicate naturally, they had to devise elaborate doctrines of 'communication' to justify their code languages. The requirements of the stage have imposed discipline, and at the same time made the poet conscious of a certain normal standard of expression which unites him with a larger world. In order that performances may at all continue the author must put his ideas across in an acceptable manner. Moreover, the wholesome contact with technical realities and the successful sharing of experiences with others must give him a new sense of liberation, a new self-confidence. It is evident that the atmosphere is clearing up, and modern poetry is beginning to find its authentic voice.

It has been attempted to show in the previous pages that even where analytical poetry of the Eliot-Day Lewis-Auden-Spender era seemed to be most dangerously original, it was in fact moving, often erratically, within a Universe of belief which bears close relation to the Past, and especially to the immediate Past covered by the nineties. The whole period between the nineties and the post-War poetry, in all its phases

its own foundations, is the keynote of the Pities in Hardy's Epic of the *process*. Brutality, whether in our dealings with fellow beings or with animals, Hardy condemned in all its forms; he did not reserve the use of compassion for any special 'classes' or sections. Like most moderns, Hardy was rather obsessed by the dark side of Nature's operations—but he did not advocate that we should follow the blind cruelties of Nature in our own dealings: most of us fall into the trap by acknowledging cruelty as legitimate in accepting its instruments. The 'Over-World' is yet largely in our mind, and from it the eternal Spirits have not been excluded. Indeed, following Hardy, we can now banish the Spirit Sinister from it.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

of self-consciousness, struggles of belief, and passionate advocacy of the Will, has been linked subconsciously, as it were, with Hardy's *The Dynasts*. Acute self-consciousness has been a symptom of the modern Age, starting from the nineties; but, as Hardy has shown, this self-consciousness, even if it assumes exaggerated forms, is fundamentally the expression of the deeper forces of compassion in humanity which are involved in the history of civilization.¹

The Conscious in Hardy's *The Dynasts* has not yet mastered the domain of Nature, nor has it established its control in human conduct, in the life of individuals, or of societies and nations. An age of rapid technical development, and the development of analytical research into every domain of thought and life, has challenged man's Will without giving a chance to those activities of the Spirit by which alone it can truly express itself. Technical resources and various new acquisitions of the mind, however, are offering new initiatives to the human purpose, and it seems that post-War poetry is intensely concerned that the creative mind of man should use them, so that many of the obvious inadequacies and wrongs in civilization can be removed.² Such ideas and anxieties, so

¹ In Auden's latest play there is a passage which shows, with a moving power, the travail of the modern mind: the attempt to see the whole, an acute consciousness of suffering and sense of danger; and along with it, the desire to make reason and emotion work together ('rejoice and operate') under the controlling Will. Ransom the Leader cries out:

O you, who are the history and the creator
Of all those forms in which we are condemned to suffer;
To whom the intelligent and necessary is also the just;
Show me my path, show all of us, that each upon
This mortal star may feel himself the danger
That under his hand is softly palpitating.
Quieten that hand, interpret fully the commands
Of the four centres and the four conflicting winds.
Those torn between the charities O reconcile.
And to the human vision lead of one great meaning,
Linking the living and the dead, within the shadow
Of which uplifting, loving and constraining power
All other reasons do rejoice and operate.

(*The Ascent of F 6*, pp. 72, 73.)

² As Mr. Yeats puts it in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (Nov.

HARDY AND THE MODERN POETIC DRAMA

long as they work in a poet's mind in the form of doctrine, cannot be an asset to literature; neither can they help the society for which the poets may agitatedly express their opinions. With maturity of experience and a more realistic grasp of life, however, modern poets are already arriving at a normal plane; their materials of experience, and their theories and valuations, so long developed in separation, are showing signs of being brought together. The poetic drama has shown a way out of the impasse; other avenues will also be opened up. Artistic self-consciousness will thus establish a natural relationship with life. Creative discontent, finding the means to ally itself to satisfying technique, will find beauty, strength, and balance; in literature, the analytical mind will have passed on its findings for the imagination to work upon and transform them into works of art.

In prose the right note has been struck; writers of the modern group, who had been made prematurely self-conscious by the War, seem to have found a better medium in prose than in poetical composition. In such a book, for example, as *South Riding*¹ we can see how the creative imagination can not only find reasons for denouncing the modern era but, with the fullest consciousness of our inadequacies and with an unsparing critical attitude, yet trace the very remarkable advance that civilization has made in all directions. The writer loved England, and saw how the children of her soil were busy on all sides making it a better and a pleasanter home for the future generations. The task is not easy; all the ability, affection, and technical resources that can be brought for it, are needed. But the work goes on; and it needs an artist to discover that not alone excited 'movements', public events, and exhortations, but the work done by ordinary men and women in their everyday affairs forms a part of the poetry of English life.

1936): 'Generations must pass before man recovers control of event and circumstance; mind has recognized its responsibility, that is all. . . .'

The word 'recover' is ambiguous, but Yeats rightly analyses the modern effort.

¹ Winifred Holtby's death at an early age is a serious loss to modern literature.

HARDY AND THE POETRY OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

'The complex tangle of motives prompting public decisions, the unforeseen consequences of their enactment on private lives, appeared to me as part of the unseen pattern of the English landscape. . . .'¹

The author tries to trace this pattern, and says that, in doing so, the existing government, the social work, all appear to her as the effort of man's will—they were

' . . . in essence the first-line defence thrown up by the community against our common enemies—poverty, sickness, ignorance, isolation, mental derangement and social maladjustment. The battle is not faultlessly conducted, nor are the motives of those who take part in it all righteous or disinterested. But the war is, I believe, worth fighting and this corporate action is at least based upon recognition of one fundamental truth about human nature—we are not single individuals, each face to face with eternity and our separate spirits; we are members one of another.'²

This is the *process*, which modern poetry tries to serve; the vision which Hardy had³ can be worked out in greater detail from a wide and intimate acquaintance with many sides of modern English life. The value of human personality, which the writer of the lines quoted above was always eager to recognize, will gain from an understanding of the collective endeavour of a great nation. There is no reason why, if poetry has to build new edifices out of its analytical consciousness of the present world, its propaganda should not include the positive achievements of modern society and give to them an enduring literary expression.

¹ Prefatory Letter in Winifred Holtby's novel published after her death.

² *Ibid.*

³ Hardy's unflinching courage of 'realism' has never been questioned, but he was also guided, even when depicting the darkest sides of life, by what he calls 'the sense of worthiness'. In his diary (Aug. 5, 1890) he writes:

'High art may choose to depict evil as well as good, without losing its quality. Its choice of evil, however, must be limited by the sense of worthiness.' (*Mrs. Hardy's Biography*, vol. i, p. 299.)

APPENDICES

I. THE NINETIES—SOME OPINIONS

II. HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

APPENDIX I

THE NINETIES—SOME OPINIONS

BECAUSE the nineties represent the end of a period we take some of its decaying traditions to be more characteristic than the advent of new forces. But many of the most gifted writers of that era did not think so. William Archer, in his illuminating survey of contemporary poetry in *Poets of the Younger Generation*,¹ quoted from an article on 'New Poetry'² in which he had previously expressed his sense of new developments in the poetry of the nineties. Archer evidently saw something more than 'disintegration' or 'decadence' in the period:

'We have the New Journalism, the New Criticism, the New Humour; we are eagerly awaiting the New Fiction and the New Drama; and some of us are fain to scent the New Poetry in the air . . . it will obey the common impulse towards . . . Realism. Take it all in all, the Old Poetry is essentially idealistic, or, if realistic, only in the pre-Raphaelite sense.

'It has always preferred to dwell in periods and places to which distance lends enchantment. Of contemporary life it has reproduced only the most elegant aspects. . . . The New Poetry . . . will take contemporary life for its province, and will bring to bear upon it a novel directness of vision and frankness of psychology . . . science, reputed its mortal foe, it will make its ally and contributory. . . .

'This forecast is in great measure a prophecy after the event. The realistic tendency was very marked in Mr. W. E. Henley's first book of verses . . . [then] comes Mr. Kipling's collection of *Barrack-Room Ballads* to prove that the impulse is felt in more quarters than one. . . . But though their aim is identical—to extract the latent poetry of the very life we live—their methods are very different. . . . Mr. Henley . . . has struck deep roots into the literature of the past . . .

¹ Written in 1899, published in 1902.

² First printed in *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 7, 1892.

APPENDIX I

[with] Mr. Kipling . . . on the other hand . . . his astounding vision and faculty are schooled only in the school of life. . . .'¹

This is a picture not of the lack of vitality, but of vivid, if sometimes rather excessive, experimentation in new directions; indeed, to Archer the attempt made by Francis Thompson to reconcile the material and the spiritual in his vision of truth,² seems to have appeared over-bold; he also deprecated Newbolt for his 'realistication' of the Arthurian legends in the *Mordred*, and thought Stephen Phillips dangerously modern in advocating a new social conscience in poetry.

If Max Nordau presaged utter ruination, 'the dusk of civilisation', &c., and preached against the blight of decadence with which he found the age threatened,³ he was answered effectively not only by Shaw,⁴ who then believed in progress in a humanitarian sense, but by the testimony of a new stir of life in the poetry of the nineties.

In *The Eighteen-Nineties* by Holbrook Jackson a very clear picture is given of the turbulent nineties:

'The period was as certainly a period of decadence as it was a period of renaissance. The decadence was to be seen in a perverse and finicking glorification of the fine arts and mere artistic virtuosity on the one hand, and a militant commercial movement on the other. The one produced the "Yellow Book" . . . the other produced the "Yellow Press"'⁵

Even in this mainly decadent strand Mr. Jackson finds

¹ *Poets of the Younger Generation*, pp. 223, 224.

² Archer speaks of Thompson as trying to think 'on the physical and psychological plane' and of the latter's 'vision of phenomena and the theories of causation and destiny'.

³ After the War Europe had Spengler to repeat the role of Nordau in a more formidable manner. In his second book Spengler somewhat modified his theory; but the false analogy of a vague mass called 'culture' with the human body, whose health, decay, and death it shared in an undefined time-sequence, persisted in his philosophy. Whether Spengler changed his ideas before his death in 1937 is not known, but it seems unlikely that he should have done so.

The cult of 'the decay of civilisation' has been a recurrent one in modern and ancient literatures.

⁴ *Sanity of Art*, George Bernard Shaw.

⁵ pp. 22, 23.

THE NINETIES—SOME OPINIONS

evidence of new tendencies. 'But this decadent side of the Nineties must not be looked upon as wholly evil . . .' and he goes on to say that it

'reveals qualities which . . . are at times surprisingly excellent. The decadent vision of Aubrey Beardsley introduced a new sense of rhythm into black and white art, just as the, on the whole, trivial masters of "fine shades", with their peacock phrases, helped us towards a newer, more sensitive and more elastic prose form. The "Yellow Press", with all its extravagances, was at least alive to the desires of the crowd. . . . If it gave Demos the superficial ideas he liked, it was equally prepared to supply a better article when the demand arose. . . .'¹

After giving an idea of the decadent side Mr. Jackson goes on to speak about the positive aspect, which according to him was no less characteristic of the nineties.

'The atmosphere of the Eighteen-Nineties was electric with new ideas which strove to find expression in the average national life. If luxury had its art and its traffic, so had a saner and more balanced social consciousness. . . . Side by side with the *poseur* worked the reformer, urged on by the revolutionist. There were demands for culture and social redemption. A wave of transcendentalism swept the country. . . . But it was not remote, it was of the earth and of the common life and hour, seeking the immediate regeneration of society by the abolition of such social evils as poverty, over-work, and the meanness, ugliness, ill-health and commercial rapacity which characterised so much of town life.'

This, again, is a passage which entirely covers our active and 'socially-conscious' period.²

¹ This remark would apply equally well to the modern Press, which has been claimed to be very much post-War.

² It would not perhaps be out of place to mention here the Armenian sonnets of Sir William Watson, in which a passionate moral fervour for justice and international responsibilities was advocated; to-day those sonnets as well as many of his other poems such as the one which begins with the line—

The World-Soul greatens with the centuries

can be appreciated as being in full harmony with the modern spirit. Sir William Watson's poems, some of which were marred by rhetoric, still await proper evaluation; in any case, the spirit that animates his 'political' poems shows the courage to

APPENDIX I

Both from Mr. Jackson's book and from *The Romantic 'Nineties* by Richard Le Gallienne ample evidence can be gained of a struggle for co-ordination and the emergence of a dynamic spirit in literature. As both of them point out, if in the verses of Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symonds we see an attitude of melodious resignation, we find side by side the new note already appearing in their works. We would not perhaps attach 'immortality' to Mr. Dowson's languidly poetic verses to 'Cynara'—though the technical dexterity displayed is superb—as even an astute journalist like Mr. Frank Harris did.¹ But we must remember that even though many of Mr. Dowson's poems carry an atmosphere of disbelief there also occur in them such verses as

But this—we cling to this, however long
In Time's dark night we dwell:
A lamp of life once lit not Death itself can quell.²

If John Davidson's poems appear to us to fail in achieving the courage of faith which Mr. Le Gallienne sees in them,³ they certainly do not support Mr. Yeats's gloomy picture of the *Tragic Generation* in his *Autobiographies*. It must also be remembered that Davidson was the first English poet successfully to introduce the rhythm of machines⁴ into English verse, and was

stand up for an unpopular cause, and a noble concern to make poetry the ally of social justice; there was nothing in his poems to betray the decrepitude of a much-maligned decade.

¹ In his essay on Dowson in *Contemporary Portraits*.

² Verses sent by Dowson to Richard Le Gallienne at the death of his wife.

³ 'In his combination of modern realism with beauty, the apprehension of beauty, that is, in contemporary realities, as in his note of revolt against conventional hypocrisies, and his vindication of the free play of human vitality, he was expressive of the best energies and ideals of the eighteen-ninety Renaissance.' (*The Romantic 'Nineties*, by Richard Le Gallienne, p. 207, 1925 ed.)

The interesting point to note is that the claim here made on behalf of the nineties is exactly what a modern critic would make as being the essential contribution of the post-nineties.

⁴ In *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* by Robert Graves and Laura Riding (pp. 182-5) a list is given of the successful lines in English poetry on which railway trains have run. The book appeared before Spender's *The Express* or Winifred Holtby's *Trains in France* (in *The Frozen Earth*, Collins, 1935), but there are other omissions; Davidson's

THE NINETIES—SOME OPINIONS

in close harmony with the whole movement towards the introduction of 'London Poetry', which Mr. Le Gallienne with slightly shocked but excited admiration refers to in his book. W. E. Henley with his *London Voluntaries* not only made a daring experiment in subject-matter but, as already pointed out, in his technique of 'free verse'; Symons introduced the contemporary music-hall into his poems; Davidson did the same in his *In Music-hall*, and also brought the modern world of journalism into prominence in his *Fleet Street Eclogues*, contrasting the 'literary life' in an industrialized community with life in the country-side. Stephen Phillips in the nineties was considered to have been especially successful in creating the poetry of 'modern life', of city life in its 'realistic' aspects. Le Gallienne's own poem *A Ballad of London* was very much on people's lips in those days. An important contribution was made along the same lines by Mr. Laurence Binyon in his two volumes of poems called *London Visions*.

What struck a critical contemporary like Mr. Le Gallienne was not the decadent character of the nineties, which generally is associated in our mind with Oscar Wilde (whose *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, however, sounded a note of realism—the social sense expressed in it is genuine) or the exaggerated bohemianism of the 'Beardsley group', but that it was a period of rapid growth and of progressive ideas.¹

Mr. Desmond Flower in his introduction to the *Poems of*

poem on the *Railway Train* is included, but verses from Kipling and Masfield ought to have found a place in the section which takes in 'Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways'. If Mr. Graves had needed aeroplanes he could have gone to no better place than the *Testament of Beauty*, in which both aeroplanes and railway trains are charmingly described.

¹ 'All forms of authority, indeed, were challenged to stand and deliver. Women, too, were beginning to assert the right to a larger freedom, and in the relations of the sexes a new and wholesome camaraderie was beginning to obtain. In this the part played by the humble bicycle, which inaugurated a freer intercourse between men and women, should not be forgotten in any survey of the time. . . . The vote was not far off for women, and the typewriter girl was soon to invade the sacred precincts of masculine offices.' (*The Romantic 'Nineties*, by Richard Le Gallienne, pp. 223, 224, 1925 ed.)

APPENDIX I

Ernest Dowson (1934) compares the typical nineties poets to the Elizabethans, and points out that they were 'rebels' 'in an age of conservative ideas'.¹ He dismisses the 'naughty nineties' theory as a myth. Mr. Desmond Flower regrets that in the popular pictures of the nineties George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* looms large, while Kipling and Hardy are considered to be out of it. It may be remarked that even George Moore was a pioneer; and though he needlessly used 'shock-tactics' he brought a detailed observation and hard human interests into his 'realistic' novels. Wells, in the nineties, was writing his romances with scientific realism: his own later novels and Arnold Bennett's graphic pictures of the Five Towns owe very much to Moore, and to Butler, who wrote vigorously during the nineties.

Mr. Osbert Burdett speaks of the heightening of egoism² and affectation, but also shows that a typical product of the nineties such as Mr. Le Gallienne, even when dealing with their aesthetic rituals, could preserve a refreshing humour and detachment.³ The Gilbert and Sullivan operas, which had started in the eighties and are still going as strong as ever, are of course the best example of the critical spirit with which the period viewed itself. Wilde's plays, for all their highbrowism, were also in a very real sense self-critical; his half-truths, moreover, did bring in new halves of truth sometimes.

The other note which is claimed to be characteristic of the

¹ In his witty book called *The Mauve Decade* Mr. Thomas Beer traces the parallel movements in American literature and life during the nineties. He shows how full of activities and ideas that period was, so that America constantly looked for initiative from the English literary movements.

² *The Beardsley Period*, by Osbert Burdett.

³ p. 189. Mr. Burdett quotes from Mr. Le Gallienne's *The Decadent to his Soul* those amusing lines in which the poet confesses that they 'Eat strange dishes to Gregorian chants'.

Sir William Rothenstein's *Men and Memories* shows the rich texture of the life of the nineties; 'the inimitable Max' and others of the group, including the author himself, plied vigorous pen and brush, and witty conversation flowed as naturally as discussion on the 'eternal verities'. This book itself illustrates the outstanding qualities of the nineties in its charm, discernment, and wide perspective of thought.

THE NINETIES—SOME OPINIONS

post-War period, the biographical note, had already in the nineties made its 'realistic' appearance. Mr. Lytton Strachey's precursors were to be found at that time.¹ The reintroduction of *Characters*, in a psychological manner, by Browning had heralded the beginning of this new movement in literature; in poetry Kipling and Masfield helped the process.

In the nineties a sound historical sense, a critical attitude towards men and affairs, and a bold technical initiative had begun to mould the drama; Shaw and Pinero were certainly not decadent; in the poetic drama, Yeats and Synge infused life into the Irish Theatre, and their influence brought that form of poetry closer to the realities of the stage. Stephen Phillips, Sturge Moore, Masfield, and Abercrombie helped in the growth of the poetic drama in its different stages; its recent form in Eliot's play has been examined. The contribution of Professor Gilbert Murray in making the poetic drama re-live has to be noted; the revival of the classical chorus form owes much to the education that the poets and the public received through his translations of the Greek Classics.

¹ 'The bud was already being taken for the flower. Hasty unripe biographies began to be written, and autobiography even was beginning to precede achievement.' (*The Romantic 'Nineties*, by Richard Le Gallienne, p. 13, 1925 ed.)

APPENDIX II

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

§ I

'HIGHER criticism' of war, it may be said, came into English poetry with Hardy's poems. By higher criticism is not meant denunciation of war and its cruelties, the sense of its futility, and sorrow at its wrongs—from the dawn of man's consciousness wars have appeared to be the manifestation of Nature's disruptive forces; poets, above all, owing to their realistic imagination, have been able to expose its horrors. But the criticism of war as a collective social break-down, as a failure of the individual personality to control the blind forces of passion, thus allowing the noble and the ignoble to get helplessly mixed up; *the sense of its preventibility*, and the general attitude based on the determination to prevent mass fratricide had not appeared in poetry till Hardy's time. Man's mastery over Nature and the growth of his analytical consciousness—the two seem to go together, though the nature of their interdependence is not known to us—have made it possible for him to take up this attitude.

The briefest historical survey is possible here, but we can refer to a few landmarks, not with a view to criticism of the attitude of the great English poets, but rather with a sense that it is their thought, and the activities of their fellow men in other spheres of life that have made the later developments possible; indeed, the responsibility the moderns owe to their predecessors and to themselves becomes all the more real if a proper historical valuation is made.

Shakespeare's detestation of war needs no special proving; in many of his dramas with almost superhuman detachment, irony, and compassion he surveys the reckless ferocity of civil wars, invasions, and insurrections. He enters the social arena

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

to disclose the roots of violence and murder; he reveals the tragedy of heroic natures being swayed by intolerance, ambition, and savagery. But the social government of the age, the standard of values accepted and adhered to by the average of men, the sense of law and the means to enforce it had not in the Elizabethan Age reached the stage which we would find in later nineteenth-century England. Reference has been made in another section to the attitude of Hamlet; in character, in nobility, in greatness of self-sacrifice he shows us the truly human standard, but from the particular point of view of war, of analysis of social forces—and therefore in his conception of social values and the possibilities of human civilization—his attitude falls short of the modern analysis. When Hamlet chooses to undertake social responsibility he unquestioningly uses all its weapons; not that he does not dislike murder, wars, armed encounters, deceptions, and slaughter of the innocent, but he never questions their inevitability. They do not compel him to look at the death of Polonius from the latter's point of view or feel anything more than a passing pity; there is no sense of self-betrayal. Hamlet's semi-madness may be a partial explanation of his lack of self-restraint and of his curious attitude of compromise with some forms of evil. He tried to control events, but that his failure was partly due to the fact that he himself used the weapons of evil without discrimination he never seems to have recognized. Hamlet's soliloquy and the speech at the end were made in full sanity. Though the grave-diggers' scene—the mercilessly lucid vision of the fate of 'Imperial Caesar' . . .—indeed, the whole atmosphere of the play fills one's heart with the sense of the utter futility of plotting, killing, and strife, there is not given, even by implication, any moral or social analysis of the situation.

In *King Henry V*, less maturely but with great effect, the problems of war and peace are examined. There are many passages carefully establishing the King's invasion as being 'a

APPENDIX II

just war';¹ it is never assumed that such grievous and destructive operations could be undertaken by a sober and responsible leader without a sense of their being irrevocably necessary under the circumstances. King Henry speaks of 'his cause being just, and his quarrel honourable'. And he goes to the centre of one of the more general problems raised by war, by disclaiming responsibility for the individual acts of cruelty indulged in by his soldiers: 'There is no king, be his cause never so spotless, if it come to the arbitrement of swords, can try it out with all unspotted soldiers . . .'; so that having taken responsibility for the necessity of war, the leader's conscience must not suffer for the cruel acts of his followers, for which they alone are individually responsible. 'Every subject's duty is the king's; but every subject's soul is his own.'² But as to the further question which modern conditions, at least in England, allow, whether the leader in war, knowing full well the weakness of human nature and the sure consequences, can avoid responsibility for the actions of his followers and for checking them or stopping them, specially as the main sufferers will be the innocent multitude who had nothing to do with the making of war—King Henry's remarks or actions do not include it. And this is due to the fact that the whole business of suffering, vicarious suffering, uncontrollability of human nature, the inevitableness of the victimization of the innocent,³ was taken as

¹ Cf. Act IV, Scene 1.

² Act IV, Scene 1.

³ Cf. Act III, Scene 3. King Henry, before the Gates with his soldiers, addresses the Governor of the town of Harfleur and says:

I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur
Till in her ashes she lie buried.
The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
And the flesh'd soldier,—rough and hard of heart,—
In liberty of bloody hand shall range.
With conscience wide as hell . . .

The point is not that these actions are condoned, indeed their condemnation could hardly have been more poignant, but that they are recognized as being rituals of war and had to be accepted as such. The theory of vicarious suffering operates, the innocent must suffer for the sins of the wicked. Even now we can hardly see how this is to be prevented, but what characterizes Hardy's *The Dynasts* and many of his other poems is that they fully face the implications of the problem. If there is to be collective

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

an unscrutinized lump of behaviour—as 'War'—no part of it could be separated from the others, so the whole thing had to be borne as destiny when events converged to create it.

The possibility that the higher criticism itself, if it can be spread amongst the people and permeate the thought of the leaders, might show us how to bring justice without the use of uncontrollable, inhuman weapons, *that the whole point of the challenge of evil lay in its challenge to man's will*, was not made in the drama. On the contrary, faced with overwhelming evil its hero tended, as many tend to-day, rather to seek justifications for evil, to trace the benefits that derive from war and bloodshed.

The attempt to find solace in some of the elements of good which can be found in a thoroughly evil situation is quite natural. As King Henry says:

There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
Would men observingly distil it out.

(Act IV, Scene 1.)

This instinct to 'distil' goodness out, to unravel the knot of good and evil, is a rational one, and leads to the understanding

suffering for the sins of individuals or nations, then surely there should also be a collective responsibility for the actions of individuals and groups; which would at once bring in the question of control. Of this collective responsibility the King does not feel conscious; not only so, he rejects it, his soldiers are exonerated:

What is it then to me, if impious war,
Array'd in flames, like to the prince of fiends,
Do with his smirch'd complexion, all fell feats
Enlink'd to waste and desolation?

What is't to me, when you yourselves are cause . . . ?

Perhaps this bitter repudiation is itself the sign of a new sense of collective responsibility; passionate hatred of war and of the savagery of war-insaned soldiers (whether of the right side or of the other), which the noble nature of the King makes him vehemently express, has in course of time got linked up with a consciousness of power which can or should control savagery. So that to modern criticism one element is lacking in the position taken up by the hero of the Shakespearian drama. The words of the King with regard to the prisoners of war who are recognized to be innocent:

Besides, we'll cut the throats of those we have

(Act IV, Scene 7)

proceed from an unfundamental sense of social morality.

APPENDIX II

of the moral law, of truth, and evidently this rational instinct of man has always been operating. Even the invocations to the God of Battles¹ and the attempt on the part of each side in a war to make an alliance with the divine proceeds from the instinctive need of relying not on passion but on moral law, and though mistaken, such efforts may be wholly genuine on both sides. But this attitude, if it is not corrected by a more fundamental conception of morality, will not only betray us, but sap the foundation of collective peace and perpetuate wars.

In this play the cry for peace is perhaps expressed more strongly than in any other drama:

Why that naked, poor, and mangled Peace,
Dear nurse of arts, plenties, and joyful births,
Should not in this best garden of the world,
Our fertile France . . . put up her lovely visage?

says the Duke of Burgundy, when the war is over, and the negotiations of peace are proceeding.

In *Coriolanus* the analysis of war is carried to a further point. The proud hero, noble in his impulses and reckless in pursuing them, lived almost continually on a pitch of passions. But, in sudden moments of cool thought, when in a favourable atmosphere the presence and the fear of evil are chased away, he also shows a rational power of imagination. After the terrible wars against the Volsci in which he had shown great heroism (and also been responsible for some of the 'indispensable' actions of war) we find him walking in the 'goodly city' of Antium, a banished leader, brooding on his lonely thoughts in an enemy country. He wakes up to the other side of the story and sympathizes with the feelings of the citizens of Antium, who would look upon him, the enemy of the Volsci, as a monster.

¹ O God of Battles! steel my soldiers' hearts . . .

(Act IV, Scene 1.)

Cf. Salisbury's speech 'God's arm strike with us!' (Act IV, Scene 3).

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

Travelling incognito, he can imagine what might happen if his identity were disclosed:

A goodly city is this Antium. City,
'Tis I that made thy widows: many an heir
Of these fair edifices 'fore my wars
Have I heard groan and drop: then know me not;
Lest that thy wives with spits, and boys with stones,
In puny battle slay me.¹

After an interruption in which he exchanges friendly greetings with a citizen he continues his reverie. The double sight which Hardy implied as being necessary to the critical consciousness is given to Coriolanus, and he sees both sides in a war; he analyses the mixture of good and bad, innocence and wrong, which is to be found not only amongst the Romans but also in the Volsci. The paradox of this situation affects his mind; the queer operations of passion and of circumstance which make people 'friends' or 'enemies', as political stratagem or passions dictate, are vividly expressed in his soliloquy.²

This double sense is implied not only in the fact that the Shakespearian drama invariably depicts the many-sidedness of events, but also in that it constantly finds expression in the actions and thought of the characters. In *Coriolanus*, perhaps, the rational mind is more effectively applied than in any other Shakespearian drama to the problem of war; Coriolanus himself, however, is not consistent, and his passionate nature

¹ Act IV, Scene 4.

² O world, thy slippery turns! Friends now fast sworn,
Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart,
Whose hours, whose bed, whose meal and exercise,
Are still together, who twin, as 'twere, in love
Unseparable, shall within this hour,
On a dissension of a doit, break out
To bitterest enmity: so, fellest foes,
Whose passions and whose plots have broke their sleep
To take the one the other, by some chance,
Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends
And interjoin their issues . . .

(Act IV, Scene 4.)

APPENDIX II

plunges him into action which clearly involves a violation of his real motives. The tragedy of Coriolanus lies in this conflict in his nature: both his greatness and his ego are present almost in equal proportion.

There is not in this drama any indication of a direct sense of moral government in relation to society, no reference that human society can, and therefore must, remove something which not only hurts and poisons it but stops its progressing sanity. But the general principle that truth is universal, and that this should not be forgotten in the time of war, is eloquently expressed by Volumnia. She shows that peace with an enemy is not incompatible with honour, that indeed in a very practical sense it is not war but peace which can establish truth and honour and remove those wrongs for which wars often are, at least ostensibly, fought. In urging her impetuous son not to sacrifice his people's safety and the possibilities of peace to his own ruthless pride she says, with reference to the two parties to the struggle:

. . . our suit

Is, that you reconcile them: while the Volscres
May say, 'This mercy we have show'd'; the Romans,
'This we received'; and each in either side
Give the all-hail to thee, and cry, 'Be blest
For making up this peace!' Thou know'st, great son,
The end of war 's uncertain; but this certain.¹

She is emphasizing the indivisibility of justice and putting the whole strength of her argument against war on the ground that war wrongly divides evil into two big masses called *enemies*, whereas the true analysis of evil cuts across those arbitrary divisions and reaches its roots on both sides.

'For myself, son,' she says,

I purpose not to wait on fortune till
These wars determine.

¹ Act v, Scene 3.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

She cannot allow the blind concourse of events to decide that which can be decided only by the voluntary will of man, and she tells Coriolanus that she is there to

Persuade [thee]
Rather to show a noble grace to both parts
Than seek the end of one.

Volumnia, of course, accepts the current combination of virtues and heroisms with war, and it happens to be a fact that those qualities did operate at her time, as they did in Shakespeare's time, and do largely in ours, in connexion with agonizing cruelties and catastrophe in human society. With the growth of civilization new fields of endeavour are being opened for the release of individual and collective heroism, and the old interlocking of prowess with some form of violent death no longer satisfies; the analytical mind at least refuses to take in the whole as 'necessary evil', or accept the vices as the counterpart, 'the other side', which life must always bring.

Milton's position with regard to war, from this point of view, fails in the final analysis. His tendency to give the 'generic stamp'—in the words of Raleigh¹—to human mind and events, often prevented him from entering into the details of conduct and circumstance.² And, therefore, even though

¹ *Milton*, by Walter Raleigh, p. 32.

² Raleigh, referring to Johnson's criticism that Milton knew 'human nature only in the gross' shows how

'He [Milton] knew human nature only in the gross. He treated nothing less momentous than the fortunes of the race. It is precisely from this cause that the incomparable grandeur of Milton's characters and situations springs. The conversations that he records are like international parleyings.' (*Ibid.*, p. 32.)

Dr. Johnson's criticism, however, holds; 'the fortunes of the race' can have little meaning or significance apart from the individuals who constitute the race. Human nature in the gross is a very nebulous entity. The Communistic over-statement or the Fascist 'racial unit' doctrines both show a recrudescence of the old conception: that not character or personality but large lumps of human lives can give us the human values. Whatever justification there might have been for taking this attitude earlier, there is none to-day; and the most advanced thinking proceeds from the individual to the collective society and comes back to the individual.

Description of broad movements of history has its value, and Milton, as Raleigh says, can make magnificent poetry out of it. But to-day the Milton of *Areopagitica*

APPENDIX II

he denounces war, like other intellectuals of his generation, he does not seem to have gone very much farther than treating it as operations of Satan or of human nature against which man had to *fight*; and in the battle of God and his angels against Satan all the methods of wholesale slaughter and mutilation are used. Book VI of *Paradise Lost* is full of gruesome details of 'justifiable war': a picture which contradicts Milton's conception of the divine as expressed by him in so many other ways.

Raleigh refers to Milton's *Apologia* at the beginning of Book IX of *Paradise Lost*,¹ in which Milton expressed his distaste for describing war and for attaching heroism to it, and says 'there is some flavour of inconsistency in Milton's apology for his theme'.²

As Raleigh points out, 'to depreciate war as a subject for the heroic Muse was ungrateful in Milton, who had devoted the whole of his Sixth Book to a description of "the wild work in Heaven"' and who had indulged his imagination with 'the invention of artillery, and the use of mountains as missiles,

'Hurled to and fro with jaculation dire.'³

'Wars, in short,' continues Raleigh, 'hold a conspicuous place in the poem—conflicts and broils so enormous that—

'War seemed a civil game
To this uproar.'

Denis Saurat, in his book on Milton, almost pathetically observes, 'the invention of gunpowder by the rebel angels has and the Milton of poetic myth-making would have to work more closely together to create the great poetry which Milton makes us claim from him.

¹ Not sedulous by Nature to indite
Wars, hitherto the only Argument
Heroic deem'd, chief maistrie to dissect
With long and tedious havoc fabl'd knights
In Battels feign'd; the better fortitude
Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom
Unsung . . .

² *Milton*, by Walter Raleigh, p. 98.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

always been a scandal to true believers'.¹ There is, however, a certain injustice in such criticism of Milton's fundamental position with regard to war. Milton's denunciation of war was as absolute as his vivid description and condonation of such destructive activities. The social background of Milton, moreover, has to be recognized; for instance, when he was engaged on his tractate on education (June 1644) the civil war was actually raging in the country. Almost against his own beliefs he forced himself to compromise; the 'Institution of breeding' which he 'delineates', therefore, is meant to be 'equally good for peace and war'. Any one-sided condemnation of Milton's attitude towards war, without recognizing the struggle that it involved for him, is clearly inadmissible.

Referring to Milton's acceptance of dualism, Charles Williams says:

'It may very well be that English poetry will never be quite happy until its thought has retrieved a unity which Milton seriously harmed. . . . Pope was a very fine poet; but his pathetic repetition of "Whatever is, is right" is silly. Wordsworth was prevented from justly fulfilling what perhaps he alone could have fulfilled. *The Ring and the Book*, great poem though it is, fails on the metaphysical side. *The Dynasts* merely denies both sides. Somehow we may have to get back to pre-Miltonic ideas—in fact, to Shakespeare. . . . In Milton's own poetry the division has its own union; *for the war is the reconciling thing*.'²

The reference to war here is to the war between good and evil, but it has close relevance to that most persistent manifestation of evil. No fundamental criticism of War is possible without a clear understanding of the concept of the moral law, that is to say, the law which admits of no different systems of value to be used according to one's convenience. To this

¹ *Milton*, by D. Saurat (Cape, 1924), p. 208.

² *The English Poetic Mind*, by Charles Williams, p. 113 (*italics mine*). With regard to this criticism of *The Dynasts*, the problem of dualism involved therein (especially in connexion with Consciousness) has been dealt with in the first chapters of this book.

APPENDIX II

day one of the causes of war is that aggressive tyrants can lead people to limit the use of the moral law to geographical areas.

The acceptance of two fixed opposites of good and evil, and the nature of his belief in the origin of creation which precluded an analytical approach inevitably affected Milton's philosophical concept of peace and war; and this philosophy deeply colours his poetry. But along with this, Milton's poetry shows the highest intellectual progress of the age in regard to all the specific social and moral problems which war involved; and in numerous passages in the *Paradise Lost* he betrays a keen consciousness of the imperatives of peace, a sense of *direct responsibility* which cannot be found in the poetry of any previous period. The lines at the beginning of the Ninth Book which invoked Raleigh's comment are themselves more of a frontal attack on War than can be found in Shakespeare; the historical consciousness which lies behind the words 'Wars *hitherto* the only Argument' is his own contribution, made possible by the general advance of the age. As to his understanding of the nature of War, one can refer to such lines as 'For what can War, but endless war still breed?' in his *Sonnet on the Lord Glen Fairfax at the siege of Colchester*; or the description in *Samson Agonistes*,

And weaponless himself
Made Arms ridiculous

(lines 30, 31);

but his most direct attack on the collective insanity of war, on the 'Destructive Impulse', to use the modern phrase, can be found in Book III of *Paradise Regained*:

They err who count it glorious to subdue
By Conquest far and wide, to over-run
Large Countries, and in field great Battels win,
Great Cities by assault: what do these Worthies,
But rob and spoil, burn, slaughter, and enslave

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

Peaceable Nations, neighbouring, or remote,
Made Captive, yet deserving freedom more
Than those their Conquerors, who leave behind
Nothing but ruin wheresoe'er they rove,
And all the flourishing works of peace destroy,
Then swell with pride, and must be titl'd Gods,
Great Benefactors of mankind, Deliverers.

Worship't with Temple, Priest and Sacrifice;
One is the Son of *Jove*, of *Mars* the other,
Till Conqueror Death discover them scarce men,
Rolling in brutish vices, and deform'd,
Violent or shameful death their due reward.
But if there be in glory aught of good,
It may by means far different be attain'd
Without ambition, war, or violence;
By deeds of peace, by wisdom eminent,
By patience, temperance. . . . (Lines 71-92.)

This long passage is quoted because surely in the whole realm of poetry, ancient and modern, a more ruthless exposure and indictment of war cannot be found. One would wish that some ebullient nations to-day would read these lines and ponder. The last four lines of the passage admit of no dualism, though the rhetorical device of making contrasts, as employed in the passage, may mislead. The truth surely is that methods of peace succeed while warfare *does not*, in securing the blessings of life. The same things cannot be won by a moral and an immoral weapon, for the results cannot be isolated from the process. Milton's attack, however, is here directed against large-scale manslaughter; the goods he shows in such sharp contrast are the fruits of peace.

But whereas the passage quoted above attacks the collective adventure of war, in a passage in the *Paradise Lost* he goes to the individual and to his relationship with his fellow men, for it is there, in feud and ill will, that the roots of war and desecration are to be sought.

APPENDIX II

... men onely disagree
Of Creatures rational, though under hope
Of heavenly Grace; and God proclaiming peace,
Yet live in hatred, enmity and strife
Among themselves, and levie cruel warres,
Wasting the Earth, each other to destroy.
(Book II, lines 497-502.)

Here the application of a universal and an inviolable standard for all 'rational' creatures including men invests the passage with its poetry. A few lines farther, he develops the idea of individual responsibility; he speaks of those who, in singing of

Their own Heroic deeds and hapless fall
By doom of Battel . . . complain that Fate
Free Vertue should enthrall to Force or Chance.
(Lines 549-51.)

The obvious emphasis here is on the responsibility of individuals for their own doom, however heroic their Battels may have appeared to be. One can trace through the heavy theological atmosphere of Milton's mind a clear development of the higher critical approach towards life's problems which he shared with his age, and expressed with his own incomparable power and effectiveness.

Wordsworth's attitude towards war has already been referred to; he went farther than Milton, and actually applied a nation's attitude towards war as a test of its integrity.¹ He hated despotism and tyranny which wages war, and the worship of brute force which makes people submit to war and destruction. In his introductory note to the Ode *The Morning of the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving, January, 1816*, he attacks 'the pernicious and degrading tendency of those views and doctrines that lead to the idolatry of power, as power . . . an infirmity that has characterised men of all ages, classes, and

¹ In his *Letter to Wilson* (1800), quoted in Book I, Chapter I, section c, p. 24.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

employments, since Nimrod became a mighty hunter before the Lord' (Collected Edition, 1888, p. 546).¹

Wordsworth dwelt more on the profound harmonies of existence, the law of peace which united the life of man with cosmic Nature and united men in humanity; he brooded deeply on the nature of this Law which for him was Duty not in the narrower conception of formal injunctions and rules of conduct, but by some subtle correspondence guided the universe of reality. It is in his conception of indivisible peace embracing cities, governments, the arts and letters, that his contribution to the understanding of war as an unnatural force found its most powerful expression.² Freedom, in every sense of the term, meant to him not an alliance with despotism to gain some material object but that state of consciously harmonized living which alone could prevent man's lapsing back into the realm of blind forces.³ Apart from this Wordsworth did not,

¹ In the Ode, however, and particularly in the elaborate argument in favour of military action, he seems to have considerably weakened his position. In the Ode he falls into the danger of advocating, for a better purpose, the very weapons that Napoleon used to satisfy a senseless vanity. That the instrument of War as such was a wrong instrument Wordsworth seems to have envisaged more clearly in his earlier days, as the letter written in 1800 shows.

² Cf.— O'erweening Statesmen have full long relied
On fleets and armies, and external wealth;
But from *within* proceeds a Nation's health . . .

(O'erweening Statesmen, 1810.)

This was in 1810; later on, in 1815, he seems to have lost something of his faith in man's inner resources.

³ This point is brought out in his poem *On a Celebrated Event in Ancient History*, 1810. Assembled at the Isthmian games, the multitude rejoiced when 'Liberty of Greece' was given to them by a Roman Master standing on the Grecian ground,

Yet were the thoughtful grieved; and still that voice
Haunts, with sad echoes . . .

. . . that a *Conqueror's* words should be so dear . . .

. . . that a *boon* could shed such rapturous joys!

As if only thus they could gain

A gift of that which is not to be given

By all the blended powers of Earth and Heaven.

Again, in his sonnet *Here Pause* he speaks with noble indignation:

That an accursed thing it is to gaze

On prosperous tyrants with a dazzled eye.

APPENDIX II

like Milton or Shakespeare, deal in detail with problems connected with war and peace.

Even though he extended much further than Milton the conception of the *conscious* principle of harmony and the dynamic nature of the creative will of man, Wordsworth himself failed to be consistent in his analysis of war as an instrument of civilization.¹ The problem as to whether a war of defence or one which is waged for helping the oppressed is justifiable, can admit of no ready answer. But the sense that whatever their nature or cause wars can and must be prevented, has to be there; otherwise the moral defence of war becomes a tool in the hands of all war-makers.

The moral problem here becomes also largely a question of technique, and the technique, again, depends on the intensity of the moral quest. It would, therefore, be taking an entirely wrong view of history to judge the actions of the past by the standard which it has been made possible to apply to-day. The moral standard and the development of technique which we have are the result of all the efforts made by our predecessors. Even at this hour the resources of civilization and the possibilities of pooling them are being measured with acute concern; the power of the individual sanity to resist a collective break-down is also an entity that cannot yet be confidently assessed. The problem, however, with which we are here concerned is related to *the standard of critical awareness*: it is the development of the analytical consciousness which dwells on the many-sided nature of the terrible phenomenon called war that is here being traced in English poetry.

¹ In the Notes he appended to the *Ode of Thanksgiving* (1816) there is no clear moral analysis of *War*; the theories he develops there would hardly fit in with his earlier views as expressed in the *Letter to Wilson* and in some of his poems. His praise for the heroes who had sacrificed themselves in the War is fully justifiable, but the condemnation of War (*as involving responsibility on both sides*) is not clear enough. This side of the question, however, will be taken up later in connexion with Rupert Brooke's poetry.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

In Tennyson's poetry the complete awareness of Hardy is absent, and there is much self-contradiction. It has been customary of late to denounce Tennyson for his bellicose sentiments. It is true that the militarism in passages of *Maud* associated with the Crimean War contradicts the lyric atmosphere of that poem and seems unworthy of it. In his war-poems and in various references to the glory of war he was not doing justice to himself; he expressed rather inadequate sentiments about the duty of the professional fighter not even to question or to find out the reasons of war but merely to offer his sacrifice in blind obedience. In these respects Tennyson's poetry did not reach his country's standard of keen intellectual criticism. But this should not be made to prejudice our view and make us think with less enthusiasm about the profoundly genuine faith that Tennyson cherished in peaceful co-operation between different sections of mankind and in 'the federation of the world'.¹ In numerous poems that side, the positive side of his contribution towards the removal of war, can be found. His sensitive consciousness, touched to the quick by human sorrow and suffering, was ever generous in outlook, even though facts of evil repeatedly swept across his vision.

In other sections the increase of social consciousness in Tennyson's poetry has been noted. A more intimate sense of human problems, of the value of the individual, of the various forces working in Nature and in human nature, can be found in his poetry than in either Wordsworth or in Milton. And he shows the definite rise of sensibility in his age in his very attempt to justify a certain gilding of the facts of war. Evidently his contemporaries were applying a standard to his poems which had not been so consciously applied at any previous time. In a poem called *Epilogue*, published in

¹ Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

(*Locksley Hall.*)

APPENDIX II

1885¹ in a volume called *Tiresias and Other Poems*, Tennyson records the anomalousness of his position and the advanced social criticism to which his war-poems had been subjected. Irene, his 'little friend', remonstrates that if

You praise when you should blame
The barbarism of wars,

then his reputation would suffer;

Not this way will you set your name
A star among the stars;

and she bases her argument on the fact that 'a juster epoch has begun'.

The poet hastens to clear up his position; he expresses his passionate love of peace and his hatred of wars:

I would that wars should cease,
I would the globe from end to end
Might sow and reap in peace,
And some new Spirit o'erbear the old
Or Trade refrain the Powers
From war with kindly links of gold,
Or Love with wreaths of flowers.
Slav, Teuton, Kelt, I count them all
My friends and brother souls,
With all the peoples, great and small,
That wheel between the poles. . . .

Why then should it be necessary for a poet to sing war-songs? Tennyson here falls back on a free admission of his inability to explain why such a hideous evil as war should attack mankind, and says,

Perchance from some abuse of Will
In worlds before the man

¹ He may also have remembered a poem called *Anti-Maud* written many years before (1855) by 'A Poet of the People' in which the author had said:

I grieve that a noble soul should have trodden a beaten road
and regretted that 'a voice that can move the heart' should lead men 'to the smoking field of death'.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

this 'mortal shadow', which wastes man's earth, has arisen.
His argument is that since this evil is there, man

Needs must fight
To make true peace his own

and

He needs must combat might with might,
Or Might would rule alone.

It is evident that he is not satisfied with the explanation as to the nature and origin of war, and in his difficulty is merely using the doctrine of the 'survival of the fittest' which obtained, in his time, in a rather superficial form. Tennyson had apparently been made much more conscious than the poets before, of war being out of place when 'a juster epoch has begun'. This very statement proved that civilization had arrived at a level when nations could at last begin to discard inadequate, destructive, and blind instruments for the removal of evil, and for the consolidation of peace and progress.

The other argument which Tennyson uses in this poem also deserves consideration; surely it behoves a poet to praise heroism and give due honour to men who have nobly sacrificed themselves and all that they cherished on this earth for what they thought was a clear call of duty;

. . . who loves War for War's own sake
Is fool, or crazed, or worse;
But let the patriot-soldier take
His meed of fame in verse.

The same argument was used often by Kipling.¹ In the poem called *In the Neolithic Age* he describes the history of the poet as a war-singer; the poet, as it were, does not enter into the right or wrongness of an event, whether of war or of peace, but just describes it. Not only so, he must give heart to human beings, when involved in an action like war, by the stimulus and encouragement of song. Kipling sees himself as being in the tradition of poets from prehistoric times; he identifies himself

¹ This point is further considered in connexion with Rupert Brooke's poems.

APPENDIX II

with the bard who, without discriminating between righteous or 'savage' warfare, lent his muse to celebrate the event:

In the Neolithic Age savage warfare did I wage
For food and fame and two-toed horses' pelt;
I was singer to my clan in that dim, red Dawn of Man,
And I sang of all we fought and feared and felt.¹

We need not accept Kipling's ideas on evolution and believe with him that human beings and human civilization still lie exactly in the same position as in the Neolithic Age. The point to be noticed here is that after his indictment of the 'cultured Christian age' he goes on to say:

There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
And—every—single—one—of—them—is—right.

The contention is really that the poet marches not in the forefront but in the rearguard of events, or rather, marches abreast with his fellow beings, sharing their experiences and playing his part by singing about them.² The critical attitude towards experience, 'criticism of life' in all its meaning, was not for the poet. And yet Kipling himself was pre-eminently the poet of 'progress'; his songs are intimately related with the far-flung activities of men and nations. There seems to be here an unresolved contradiction; but the explanation perhaps is simply this, that Kipling's poetic vision closely kept within the limits of his own conception of work and of the limits of progressive activities. He began as a pioneer, and sang of the new activities made possible by the scientific age; but his age moved faster forward than he could. During the latter part of his life, therefore, he produced poetry which, in its interpretation and valuation of his age, did not register much advance beyond what he had made in the first flush of his creative power. He became a *status-quo* poet, just as the Symbolist and Ivory-tower

¹ *The Seven Seas*, 1896.

² 'And—every—single—one—of—them—is—right'—that is to say, all songs, whatever their attitude towards life may be, whatever may be the manner of celebrating wars or adventure, were perfectly justified. It is the 'Art for Art's sake' argument, appearing in a new form.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

artists who refused to move outside of their own convention of art had also become *status-quo* poets.¹ But that a more balanced view is possible has been abundantly proved by Mr. Kipling's own contemporaries. To take two examples, Mr. Masfield has shown how realistic poetry of action can also admit larger valuations and the intangible but equally real urges of human society; Mr. Yeats, on the other hand, who began as a Symbolist, dared to break the tradition of world-rejecting beauty, blending in his later period various elements of modern life.

Kipling's poetry of war, from the point of view of this survey, lacks therefore the finer synthesis; and fails to realize a harmony between social technique and the moral law. One important thing, however, emerges both from the verses of Tennyson and of Kipling that have been quoted above. The implication of their poems is that the poet who sings the war-song to hearten his fellow men is really performing a deeper and a very real constructive function. By celebrating heroism, by investing action with nobility, majesty, and honour, even when the situation is terrible, he is in reality establishing those values and also isolating them from the other aspects of war. By placing his emphasis instinctively on the fundamentally human motives and emotions interlocked with the phenomenon of war, the poet has from the beginning of history made man increasingly conscious of the higher values.² To-day

¹ The two following quotations would illustrate this point:

(a) J. M. Hone, in his book on Yeats (Dublin and London, 1916), quotes the latter's essay in the *Pathway* (1908); Yeats regretted that for a long time he had thought 'that all action, and all work that led to action, were a little vulgar, a little trivial. Ah, how many years it has taken me to awaken out of that dream!' (p. 52.)

Villiers de l'Isle Adams's remark that they did not condescend to live life but let their servants live it, has passed into a proverb.

(b) Kipling's poem *L'Envoi* in *Barrack-Room Ballads* is a good example of the worship of '*the God of Things As They Are*'. Work, and the joys of work which result when individuals stick to their vocations 'each in his *separate* star', are idealized in this poem. (*Italics mine.*)

² Harold Munro in his article on 'The Future of Poetry' touched this point from another angle:

'Warfare was the original expression of man's physical consciousness; poetry was

APPENDIX II

we have come to a point when we can even begin to break up the particular combination of noble and heroic qualities with warfare; the poet to-day is seeking to present those wonderful traits of character which have always had their play in warfare with more rational forms of collective adventure. Patriotic pride may easily join hands with an international conquest of evil. But this attitude itself has a close interdependence with the progress of civilization. We have not yet come anywhere near to our realization; again and again our hopes are dashed down and, in the Great War, the finest manhood of Europe, whatever the causes of fratricide might have been, gave up their lives in war.

Hardy was the first poet consistently and most comprehensively to apply the higher criticism of war in poetry; though he too, like others, was temporarily shaken in his convictions when the skies had darkened suddenly. Hardy's critical philosophy as embodied in his life-work had, however, penetrated into the minds of the nation and, with the first shocks of war, poets like Sassoon, Owen, Blunden, Sorley—to name only a few of the youthful poets—produced poetry in which fundamental criticism of war was seen in its most poignant form. They had carried on Hardy's initiative when Hardy himself, after the tremendous labour of *The Dynasts*, was not ready in his advanced age for the terrible catastrophe.

Hardy's poetry makes a new valuation of war and peace, and of the various social and moral problems which they involve for the individual; in numerous poems the most ad-

the first sign of the spirit. Its entire function was to excite heroic emotion by means of imaginative or passionate language. The song of the young world was like a sounding-board, a drum, a very echo of the elementary passions. Metre and meaning were one; the medium of expression was coincident with the necessity for it. . . .

'But presently the minstrel replaced the bard; love was made the chief motive, and war became incidental. Selection replaced impulse; treatment became independent of substance, metre or subject.

'Then last, the minstrel became poet. . . .' (*Poetry Review*, Jan. 1912.)

The picture may not be historically unchallengeable, but the way in which 'the poet' has led men to an increasingly conscious acceptance of the permanent values, by fixing them in artistic expression, is well brought out here.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

vanced criticism can be found, almost in every manner conceivable to our modern imagination. It has been seen how *The Dynasts* deals with the issues of war and peace; the collective and the individual struggles, the integral problems of consciousness, the possible emergence of the 'informed' Will have been stated there in terms of psychology and conduct which came much later into use. The post-War poets are, largely by unconscious assimilation, using his analysis and expressing his attitude. We are still living in this matter in the Age of Hardy. These pages have discussed how the linking up of Will and the imperatives of action with the problems of war and of social reconstruction is engaging the modern poets. In offering 'moral equivalents to war', often with crude propaganda, the modernist poet is illustrating the applications of the Will-idea in terms of social organization, politics, economic adjustment, psychological and medical remedies. He is trying to make poetry out of the extended possibilities of the era; what Hardy could conceive as an ideal, he seeks to establish in material terms.

Before proceeding to a further examination of Hardy's war-poetry and discussing its connexion with the poetry produced during the War and afterwards, it would perhaps be fitting to bring up this inadequate survey to the point where Hardy, in a noble poem, celebrates the downfall of the God of Battles. In this poem Hardy speaks from the very heart of his country's humanity. True to the tradition, he preserves that serene vision which, without bitterness or grieving, allows him to look into the heart of the modern Age. He begins his poem on the *Sick Battle-God*¹ with an historical description of the past career of this deity:

In days when men had joy of war,
A God of Battles sped each mortal jar;
The peoples pledged him heart and hand,
From Israel's land to isles afar.

¹ *Poems of the Past and Present*, 1902.

APPENDIX II

He describes the 'crimson form' of this Power and how the leaders invoked 'fearsome aid' for him 'in rune and rhyme'. Then, following on the lines of Tennyson that 'a juster epoch has begun', he says: 'but new light shone'. 'Modern meditation broke His spell'—the domain of the War-god was broken:

That penmen's pleadings dealt a stroke,
Say some; and some that crimes too dire
Did much to mire his crimson cloak.

Then Hardy enters the deepest source of his belief, and here we have the very core of his message. With complete fairness he offers tribute to his forefathers, to the unremembered acts and sacrifices of generations of men which have brought humanity forward and made it possible for us better to deal with the problems of existence. It is not indeed true that the Battle-god has ever ruled the world; far more powerful forces have worked in civilization for the growth of fellowship in man:

Yea, seeds of crescive sympathy
Were sown by those more excellent than he,
Long known, though long condemned, till then—
The gods of men in amity.

He then develops this idea of the spiritual unfoldment of humanity:

Souls have grown seers, and thought outbrings
The mournful many-sidedness of things,
With foes as friends, enfeebling ires
And fury-fires by gaingivings!

Here he first establishes the modern consciousness of war; the higher criticism has come with the operations of thought which bring out '*the mournful many-sidedness of things*'—mournful, because the first effect of increasing one's area of consciousness and the linking up of effects and causes and responsibilities in one's personal life is apt to be disquieting.

Hardy, however, does not, in the illumination of his hope,

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

ignore the fact that wars still exist;¹ what he claims is that the blind acceptance of war as an *unavoidable* instrument of fate has ended. The War-god has lost his divinity, and however different may be the valuations of men of this fact, it is undeniable that a new consciousness has arrived:

Let men rejoice, let men deplore,
The lurid Deity of heretofore
Succumbs to one of saner nod;
The Battle-god is god no more.

§ 2. '*The Dynasts*' and *Some of the War-Poets*

Lamentings heard i' the air, strange screams of Death
And prophesyings with accents terrible.

Macbeth.

Hardy's best war-poems were written before the War. When the vast tragedy actually descended on the life of Europe his pen faltered, and though he wrote some noble verses during the period of the War, much of his writings, like those of his suffering countrymen, was seared by the immediacy of experiences. He could not rise to the passionate heights which youth could attain; the master of irony and of compassion passed on his torch to the brave hands of Sassoon, Owen, and Blunden; the first spontaneous notes of uncritical but noble self-giving found their wistful, majestic expression in Rupert Brooke's war-sonnets.

It is not our purpose to scrutinize here the poems of these young war-poets or of their comrades such as Edward Thomas, Sorley, Robert Graves, and others. The poems of that period have been evaluated by competent critics, and the outstanding ones acclaimed and enshrined in the hearts of this generation.

¹ Yet wars arise, though zest grows cold;
Wherefore, at whiles, as 'twere in ancient mould
He looms, bepatched with paint and lath;
But never hath he seemed the old!

(The Sick Battle-God.)

APPENDIX II

It may not, however, be out of place to mention that the recent reaction to Rupert Brooke's poems is unfair and proceeds from a wrong standpoint. That Rupert Brooke failed to understand the tremendous implications of war is quite natural, considering that he was not only too young to analyse it seriously, but that he was never fully involved in the conflict himself. Imaginatively he faced the fact of death, and bringing out the best elements of the heroism and unselfish surrender of youth, he built his verses on the actual fact.¹ We are always faced with events which have happened, irrespective of the consideration as to how and why they happened; the poignant events of life may leave us no choice but offer themselves to us. We may wish them to have happened otherwise, we do not want the finest and noblest and the most generous-hearted youth to be sacrificed in war, and we must prevent such tragedies, but when we are faced with the fact that men much nobler than

¹ The youths in his poem are 'proudly human', 'the years had given them kindness'; there is not a single note of violence or of ungenerous action in his poems. Looking across the years, the constant preoccupation with death which one finds in his earlier poems seems prophetic—as if he knew about the coming *Funeral of Youth* and tried to escape from its shadow. In his *Flight* this feeling is vividly expressed—'Safe! I was safe'; also in *The Voice* he says:

Safe in the magic of my woods
I lay.

The world was becoming unsafe for men of idealism and faith, and though Rupert Brooke restlessly moved about in strange seas and in the realm of his dreams, when the blind hour came he shared unhesitatingly the sufferings of millions of fellow mortals.

Mr. Blunden in his introduction to *An Anthology of War-poems*, edited by F. Brereton (Collins, 1930), tells us:

'At first, speaking broadly, the poetry thus [by the sudden events of War] called into existence was concerned with the beauty of English life, made distinct by the act of separation, renunciation. The fact of war was still strange and enigmatic. . . . Rupert Brooke perfected the theme which they [the young war-poets] mostly had. He was already a man of exalted view and graceful expression. As it chanced, he did not see the war in its later unfoldings . . . he did not discern anything more complex in the case than sacrifice for an ideal, consolation for the sacrifice; what he discerned, that he adorned with a classical manner. . . .' (pp. 14, 15, Introduction.)

In Sassoon's poetry, the Introduction continues, are to be found 'outbursts of white anger against those who drowned all the cryings of truth with clamorous claptrap or vulgar excess . . .'. The disillusionment came with actual experience.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

ourselves have suffered and perished uncomplainingly, it would not be only inhuman but completely quixotic to withhold admiration.

A. E. Housman's famous poem *Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries* has been blamed by some for its indirect praise of war in sanctifying its victims. But even the emotional exaggeration of the part played by soldiers—'What God abandoned, these defended'—proceeds from a poignant compassion and an appreciation, which the poet makes us share, of almost super-human endurance and fortitude, of sufferings undergone not for one's own sake but for the sake of the entire society. Because of the undying flame of justice, and of duty, which burns in the human heart, and owing to the action of men who have not yielded to wrong, civilization has so far been able to consolidate itself:

Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
They stood, and earth's foundations stay.

But the time has come when we begin dimly to discern how earth's foundations can be made secure without bringing human lives to a violent end. There is no contradiction involved in giving just praise to those who have nobly died, and saying at the same time that we must, for very shame, find out better methods by which this nobility can be expressed; we must make it possible for men not to die but to live for truth. Rupert Brooke's sonnets first published in the *New Numbers* stirred the deepest humanity of his generation; far from making his fellow men think of war as being justifiable it made them realize the enormity of the crime which ruthlessly inflicts martyrdom on youth. To-day, after the first bitter shock of disillusionment is over, when we have analysed and to some extent thrashed out the problems of war, we can read Rupert Brooke's sonnets, and many other poems written during the War, with a detached mind; we can give unstinted praise, where it is due, to their power of feeling and expression.

APPENDIX II

On Hardy's war-poems Pity and Irony play with equally moving effect.

The truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled¹

touched every tissue of Hardy's poems on war, just as it touches in the poems of Wilfred Owen. Hardy builds up his effects, as has already been seen in *The Dynasts*, by echoings and re-echoings of war within the sphere of war itself; we are suddenly given an objectivity in the very midst of an overwhelming experience which revives our faculty of feeling and makes the experience all the more inexpressibly tragic. Owen uses the same effect when, in a war-poem, describing the devastation of an unending war, he brings an oblique view. He describes the explosion of shells in the distance as happening

Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.²

Hardy, in many of his descriptions in *The Dynasts*, used this subtle sensibility. In the comprehensive consciousness which makes the enemies and the allies appear together in their human relationships, Owen comes very close again to Hardy. Reference has already been made to the *Strange Meeting*; and it will be seen presently that the parallelism between Hardy's and Owen's attitude towards War is maintained throughout.

If Pity has been the guiding spirit of Owen's poems, Irony never fails to play the part of a good second; the same can be said about the war-poems of Siegfried Sassoon. In Sassoon's poems the irony, springing from disillusionment, often fails to save itself from bitterness. It is quite natural, and one could almost say proper, that it should be so. *Counter-attack* is meant to be a counter-attack; the apologists of war who were responsible for a great deal of it, and who later misused Rupert Brooke's poems so that an entirely wrong series of associations gathered round them, could not very well complain, even if the soldier-poet sometimes could not fully control his anguish

¹ *Strange Meeting*, by Wilfred Owen.

² *Exposure*, by Wilfred Owen.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

and bitterness. Sassoon's irony reminds one of Hardy, for there is hardly any aspect of war that Hardy has not mercilessly satirized. Here again Hardy was a pioneer; it is difficult to believe that he analysed the problems of modern warfare, as he did, before the Great War took place.¹ It may be permitted to quote two more extracts from *The Dynasts* which are entirely in keeping with the spirit of the young war-poets. Here is a description of war-profiteers:

Warfare mere,
Plied by the Managed for the Managers;
To wit: by frenzied folks who profit nought
For those who profit all

(Part III, Act VII, Scene 8)

—it could occur almost anywhere in the poetry of Sassoon, or Blunden. The description of diplomats, ostensibly consulting each other for bringing about peace, is no less powerful:

The Congress of Vienna sits,
And war becomes a war of wits,
Where every Power perpend withal
Its dues as large, its friends' as small;
Till Priests of Peace prepare once more
To fight as they have fought before!²

¹ Hardy's satire of War makes one think of Southey's exquisite poem. Southey's gentle satire cuts deep; but his *Blenheim* was an act of genius rather than part of a well-considered philosophy. There is nothing, however, which can match the overpowering effect with which Southey applies the simple, the eternal human standard, to the blind betrayal of War:

'But what they fought each other for
I could not well make out;
But everybody said,' quoth he,
'That 'twas a famous victory.'

'Why, 'twas a very wicked thing!'
Said little Wilhelmine.
'Nay . . . nay . . . my little girl,' quoth he,
'It was a famous victory.'

(*The Battle of Blenheim.*)

Little Wilhelmine was wiser than most of us; it will take time before the general run of civilization can come up to that level.

² *The Dynasts*, Part III, Act V, Scene 1.

APPENDIX II

Hardy, like Sassoon, used not only Irony but the Spirit Sinister to depict War in its raw vividness, and yet in spite of their attack, the Spirit of Pity hovers in the background of their poems.¹ It is by blending those three elements in the right proportion that the *cathartic* value of art can be obtained; the significance of events can then be made clear to a purified Will. Hardy, therefore, kept the Spirits working together, instead of separately; where this did not happen, as it did not happen also in some of the polemic poems of Sassoon, the mind reacts in excitement but the personality of the reader is not engaged; the War becomes a terrible outside event, but not one which enters the sphere of our individual responsibility. In most of Hardy's war-poems the three elements appear in subtle combinations, emotions are evoked which can no longer be defined, as one cannot define what one feels after reading Sassoon's *Everyone Sang*. Memories move, despair, pain, and frustration become acute in the mind, and yet they are reconciled with something profounder than we can admit; a recognition of the dignity of human life which no evil can injure, and yet an intense indignation that all this was allowed to happen, appear together in our consciousness.

Blunden's use of contrasts and of subtle changes of visual and emotional background, to make the imagination work up a scene—almost without knowing how inevitably this has been done—is also to be found in Hardy's war-poems. Blunden can tell us of the concert-party at *Busseboom*² in which Generals and lame privates joined; and then shift our attention suddenly. But then, it is the suddenness with which tragic realizations are often brought home to us when, living in the very heart of suffering, we have had a moment's normality. The concert hardly ends before

We heard another matinée,
We heard the maniac blast . . .

¹ With Hardy the motive force was always compassion; as Robert Lynd remarks, 'Hardy's pity is a passion, and his irony springs from it.' (*New Statesman*, June 3, 1932.)

² *Collected Poems*, p. 148.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

—the unnaturalness of war again becomes the reality. In another poem we are told about the soldiers who

Sang as though nothing but joy came after!¹

Hardy often gets these effects, as Blunden does, by depicting war through tragedies shared by Nature's innocence, by birds and little animals. The wrongness of events could hardly be more sharply expressed than in the simple comment:

Cocks crow, thinking it sunrise, ere they are burnt to death²

—the illumination at night was but a signal of death.³

Blunden shows the trenches in moonlight, and tells of bird-songs heard during a lull in the firing . . . and then the 'terror', 'the nemesis of beauty' comes;⁴ sometimes he paints just beyond the arena of fear and fate, the vision

Of peace, five miles away;

In sight, hills hovered, houses gleamed. . . .⁵

In *The Dynasts* the setting of Albuera is thus described:

'Away, behind these [battlefields] stretches a great wood several miles in area . . . the . . . stream . . . behind . . . the wood . . . the morning sky lightens momentarily. The birds . . . are heard singing their overtures with their usual serenity.'⁶

Both Blunden and Hardy add poignance to their description of War's devastation by noting the details of beauty which appear as a curious contradiction of the context:

¹ In the poem *At Senlis Once* (*Collected Poems*, Edmund Blunden).

² *The Dynasts*, Part III, Act I, Scene 7.

³ The figure of Napoleon frightens the crows:

. . . It is He!

The startled crows, their broad black pinions raising,
Forsake their haunts, and wheel disquietedly.

(Ibid., Scene 7.)

⁴ *Illusions* (*Collected Poems*, p. 140). Compare *Gouzeaucourt: The Deceitful Calm* (ibid., p. 157).

⁵ *Rural Economy* (ibid., p. 149).

⁶ Part II, Act VI, Scene 4. Compare another description; in the battle of Waterloo, 'The night grows clear and beautiful, and the moon shines musingly down. But instead of the sweet smell of green herbs and dewy rye as at her last beaming . . . the stench of gunpowder. . . .' (Part III, Act VII, Scene 8.)

APPENDIX II

Behold the gorgeous coming of those horse,
Accoutred in kaleidoscopic hues,
That would persuade us war has beauty in it!¹

say the Pities. The same note occurs in Blunden's *Vlamertinghe*, when we are shown 'the golden lights' of flowers, the daisies and roses and poppies which dress the country-side with beauty

Spite of those brute guns lowing at the skies.²

In poems like *Return of the Native*,³ one of the most perfect poems written about the War, the events are seen in Time's perspective; the 'burning rout', 'Time's vast compulsion', is over, and the individual is left with the task of stopping 'the poisonous work' which

Broke the fair sanctuary of this world's rest
And circumvented God.

This emergence of the Will, holding all the emotions together, and looking across the avenues of Time, slowly turns Hardy's war of *The Dynasts* into a drama of human action; the same note occurs in Sassoon and in Blunden, both of whom have, even recently, given us poetry which derives from experiences shared with those who lost their lives in the War. They write of the men who died so that people of another generation

May yet redeem our clay
When we and war together, one wise day,
Have passed away.⁴

¹ *The Dynasts*, Part III, Act VII, Scene 4.

² *Collected Poems*, by Edmund Blunden, p. 152.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴ From *Poems of the War and After*, by Vera Brittain.

A fuller quotation can be given here from this remarkable poem—*The War Generation* (Vale):

For us they live till life itself shall end,
The frailties and the follies of those years,
Their strength which only pride of loss could lend,
Their vanished hopes, their sorrows and their tears;
But slowly towards the verge the dim sky clears,
For nobler men may yet redeem our clay
When we and war together, one wise day,
Have passed away.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

§ 3. Hardy's 'Premonitory' Poems of War; and Later War-Poems

A few of Hardy's war-poems, written as though he had, like Kubla,

... heard from afar
Ancestral voices prophesying war,

can be examined here as examples of his curious prescience. He had looked deep into the inscrutable mirror of destiny and his broodings caught the power of unconscious prophesying;

Men's musings are busy with forecasts
Of mustery and battle,
And visions of shock and disaster
Rise red on the year

he had written in the Fore-Scene of *The Dynasts*, not knowing what prospective realism had informed his pen. But it is not very surprising that Hardy, a close student of history and an experienced watcher of the skies who had often seen clouds gather on the human scene, should have felt disturbed at the drift of events; that his imagination, which had often dwelt on the past, should have expressed his forebodings in actual terms of war. It seems curious, however, that with the Great War actually begun, a critic like Lytton Strachey, reviewing Hardy's *Satires of Circumstance*,¹ should have failed to find significance in Hardy's poems. Not only so, Strachey considered Hardy's melancholy as something unnatural and unwarranted; he could not see why Hardy should have suffered, 'in Gibbon's poignant phrase, "the abridgement of hope"'. Like many other intellectuals, Strachey failed to *connect*; the War was a monstrous interlude; suffering or foreboding, as expressed in poetry, had nothing to do with it. This was a natural attitude, and perhaps it was necessary that it should have been taken at a time when the impact of experience daily grew overwhelming, but it was

¹ In the *New Statesman*, Dec. 1914.

APPENDIX II

precisely here that Hardy broke new ground. He brought poetry at once into grip with the full range of modern life. It was no modern theory of 'inclusive consciousness' but a naturally developed sensibility which made Hardy a pioneer in the twentieth-century poetry. The poems of the young war-poets could hardly have been written if Hardy had not made his generation more self-conscious than before through his own writings.¹

In this volume, *Satires of Circumstance*, death and war are the dominant theme; references to actual warfare, to war graves, to parting and bereavement are to be met in poem after poem. *Channel Firing*, written in April 1914,² tells of 'gunnery practice out at sea', the menacing sound of which makes the dead rise out of their graves, thinking that the final hour had come. They address God thus:

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel window-squares.
We thought it was the Judgment day.

But God answered:

All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters
They do no more for Christ's sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

¹ A. E. Housman's *Shropshire Lad* and his other poems written during the end of the century but published much later in *Later Poems* show how his sensitive imagination suffered from premonitions. Housman exaggerated the sufferings of country people and the prevalence of soldiering, &c., and mixed them up perhaps with what he had read about the Boer War or the Turkish massacres. That Shropshire itself was not filled with gibbets, gallows, homicides, and suicides needs no proving; Masfield's Shropshire, for instance, depicted realistically enough in his narrative poems, gives us another truth. The reticent beauty of Housman's lyrics has deservedly made them popular, and some of them came from the depths of his mind; but the *morbidezza* of his war-haunted poems seems significant to-day. This pessimism was fundamentally different from Hardy's sorrow, protest, and challenge to the Will; but this was partly due to the fact that Hardy's acquaintance with country people, with humanity in general, was far more comprehensive.

² Mrs. Hardy notes the prophetic quality of this poem in her Biography.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

The dead wondered, and

So down we lay again. 'I wonder
Will the world ever saner be',
Said one, 'than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!'

The sounds of war continued:

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as 'Stourton Tower',
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

In the poem *The Ghost of the Past* Hardy already sees the present join the ranks of the dead; in *In Death Divided* lifeless bodies appear; there are poems on *The Two Soldiers*, *The Death of Regret*, *The Roman Grave-mounds* (written in November 1910), arousing thoughts of the war-dead; all these poems deal not only with death but also with the devastation of war. In *Spectres that Grieve*, 'apparitions', the ghosts of men who have been stricken by fate without the chance of proving themselves, wait for the justice to be done to them by History.

We are stript of rights; our shames lie unredressed,
Our deeds in full anatomy are not shown.

Thus, too, cried the later dead who were driven by overwhelming circumstance to a frightful end, no chance ever being given to them of telling the world about their actions and motives. There is the grimly satiric poem *Are You Digging On My Grave?*; in the poem called *Self-Unconscious* there is a picture of Nature stricken by death,

Dead now as sherds
Are the yellow birds—

the scattered dead bodies of helpless men seem also to rise up before one's eyes. The poem *The Discovery* speaks of the blight: the epidemic, as it were, of death, which meets the poet's eye wherever he goes:

APPENDIX II

I wandered to a crude coast
Like a ghost;
Upon the hill I saw fires—
Funeral pyres. . . .

Thus the poems go on. But it is not merely the spectacle of unredeemed desolation. There is a symbolic poem, called *God's Funeral*, in which the poet sees through the agony of the immediate present into the distant dawn of hope. This poem tells of a mysterious figure getting down from a 'slowly-stepping train'—at once reminding us of troop-trains, the wounded, and the dead—then there is a shadow picture of relatives and friends who have come to receive him—¹

Sweet women, youths, men, all incredulous,
A crowd of mourners.

The poet, who is also there, sees this gloom, this mourning, and this shadowy figure; and yet, he finds somewhere in the distance a flicker of light whose call cannot be resisted.

Puzzled twixt the gleam and gloom
says the poet,

Mechanically I followed the rest.

There are several other poems of the same note. In the section of the collected edition of his poems called *The Poems of War and Patriotism* there are some of the well-known poems written after the War began, like *Men who March Away* and *England to Germany in 1914*, where, combined with a protest against the war-spirit in Germany, there is belief in and appeal

¹ This poem reads almost like a sequel to Owen's *The Send-Off*:

Down the close, darkening lanes they sang their way
To the siding-shed,
And lined the train with faces grimly gay.

Owen asks at the end:

Shall they return to beatings of great bells
In wild train-loads?
A few, a few, too few for dreams and yells,
May creep back, silent, to village wells
Up half-known roads.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

to the fundamental humanity of the people of that country.¹ Along with such pieces appears in that section a very remarkable poem called *His Country*, again written before the War, in 1913, which deserves more adequate recognition than has been given to it. This poem not only presents, with the novelist's vivid power, the adventure of a wandering patriot, but also brings with startling clarity an attitude towards the wider patriotism, which, even after much suffering and disillusionment, we have not yet succeeded in establishing in a tortured world. Patriotism is naturally held up as a fine and noble element in the human character; but it is also shown how patriotism of the genuine kind admits the right to similar sentiment in other people, and thus makes for that real international understanding which is based on the recognition of common rights and a unity of aspiration.² Such a patriotism has nothing to do with war; indeed it finds in the war-spirit a direct contradiction to love and loyalty to one's motherland. After having been sent out to a foreign country to take part in a fratricidal war, for which the soldiers individually had neither sympathy nor responsibility, many of them must have asked, like Hardy's patriot,

Whom have I to fight,
And whom have I to dare,
And whom to weaken, crush, and blight
On my way everywhere?

Injustice has been done to Hardy's attitude towards life, and his 'pessimism' is still much talked of; it is necessary, therefore, to remember how not only a balanced judgement but also an

¹ In Sassoon's poems, e.g. *Glory of Women*, *Reconciliation*, &c., and in Blunden's *Undertones of War*, this realistic and yet humane criticism of war can be found. Owen's *Strange Meeting*, perhaps the greatest war-poem, proceeds from the same attitude.

² This conception of patriotism is to be found also in his earlier poems. In the poem called *Departure* (Oct. 1899) published in *Poems Past and Present* occur the lines:

When shall the saner softer politics
Whereof we dream, have sway in each proud land
And patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to stand
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?

APPENDIX II

intense note of hope rings out in some of his heart-broken utterances. Even in the poems produced during the War-years he, like Bridges, saw far beyond the mist and mire into the verities of human life.¹ The sanity which comes with mature experience, and far-reaching valuations of conduct we naturally would expect from Hardy; we also find in his poems how he resisted the contagion of mass hatred, even at a time when passions and suffering ran high. In walking about in a village lane he hears simple German prisoners, themselves the victims of circumstance, talking in their native language; he is made intensely aware of the brutal futility which makes human beings of one country and another rush into catastrophe. His poem cries out against

. . . Whosoever they be
At root and bottom of this, who flung this flame
Between kin folk kin tongued even as are we. . . .²
(April 1915.)

¹ In the *Ode on the Tercentenary Commemoration of Shakespeare, 1916*, Bridges invoked the generous spirit of England, and expressed his great sorrow that this blight of war should have come to the land of Shakespeare:

Kind dove-wing'd Peace, for whose green olive-crown
The noblest Kings would give their diadems,
Mother who has ruled our home so long,
How suddenly art thou fled!
Leaving our cities astir with war . . .

And yet the spirit of Peace was not dead, beauty is awake even in the midst of sorrow, making it all the more poignant:

And yet on the fair fields deserted
Lingerest, wherever the gaudy seasons
Deck with excessive splendour
The sorrow-stricken year,
Where cornlands bask and high elms rustle gently,
And still the unweeting birds sing on by brae and bourn . . .

He seeks the spirit of Shakespeare, who could
dower with inexhaustible treasure
A world-conquering speech

to come and restore man's humanity. In the poem called *Christmas Eve, 1917*, published in the same volume (*October and Other Poems, 1920*), he prays that 'Peace shall come as a flood upon all mankind'. It is strange that these poems should never have found their place in any anthology of war-poems.

² *The Pity of It*, in *Moments of Vision*.

HARDY AND 'WAR-POETRY'

That famous poem, which has so often appeared in anthologies—*The Eternal*¹—shows in Hardy's manner a picture of humanity on the screen of an immense, immovable sky of fate. But the majestic scene is condensed in a few moving stanzas and the perspective, we may note, is not made crooked by any false emphasis on pain or frustration. It is 'war's annals' which 'will cloud into night', and the simple man 'harrowing clods', the villager, the labourer, who will remain. 'Though dynasties pass' the man and the maid and the story of their love will continue. To find this note we come again to *Satires of Circumstance*, where, in the apparently desolate poem called *In Death Divided*, Hardy stresses the eternity of human relationships. Death may divide us physically, but it cannot break those ties which lie beyond its reach—

And in the monotonous moils of strained, hard-run Humanity,
The eternal tie which binds us twain in one
No eye will see
Stretching across the miles that sever you from me.

This 'eternal tie', binding not only individuals but nation and nation together, is always evident in Hardy's war-poems.² Bound by their common humanity men will venture forth to war not against each other but against evils which threaten

¹ Written in 1915 and published in anthologies as *Eternal* and under other names; in the *Moments of Vision* it is called *In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'*.

² In Abercrombie's *Ceremonial Ode* the eternity of man's creative spirit is contrasted with the War:

This, then, is yours: to build exultingly
High, and yet more high,
The knowledgeable towers above base wars . . .
.
That so Man's mind, not conquered by his clay,
May sit above his fate,
Inhabiting the purpose of the stars,
And trade with his Eternity.

In the *Ryton Firs* the ravages of war are seen in their monstrosity through the atmosphere of English woods and country-side.

APPENDIX II

their existence; and future generations will sing not the heroism of war but of Peace:

And they shall see what is, ere long,
Not through a glass, but face to face;
And Right shall disestablish Wrong:
The Great Adjustment is taking place.¹

The 'Great Adjustment' can take place because of

The sure, unhasting steady stress
Of Reason's movement.²

But it is not only Reason that advances; compassion is also increasingly dominating man's attitude towards life. Hardy traces the development of man's humanity in connexion with his attitude towards other sentient creatures; cruelty, he says, is definitely dwindling and vague sympathy is being translated into a principle of conscience:

What was faint-written, read in a breath
In that year—ten times ten away—
A larger louder conscience saith ,
More sturdily to-day.³

It is the advance of Reason and Compassion which, according to Hardy, will ultimately stop wars—it is then that life will be made purposive:

The purposed Life outshone—
Serene, sagacious, free . . .⁴

he says, speaking of an individual whose greatness of mind and heart had won his admiration. Man, freed from wrong, can then lie
in the All-One's thought.

Not evasion of life, but mastery of its truth, can make us win the perfect freedom. For, as he says in his last poem, we can be

By truth made free.⁵

¹ *There seemed a Strangeness, in Human Shows.*

² *A Cathedral Façade at Midnight* (ibid.).

⁴ *Dedication to V. R. in Poems Past and Present.*

³ *Compassion* (ibid.).

⁵ *Winter Words.*

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